

(UN)HEARD



VOICES OF THE HOMELESS

(UN)HEARD

P3 charity approached The Everyman Theatre asking if we could do a creative project with people who are homeless or vulnerably housed in Gloucestershire. The Everyman were very keen to partner with P3 as we are committed to developing the work that we had been doing with Kings Table at Trinity Church, Cheltenham for several years. We approached the Commissioners Fund for some funding and thankfully we were successful. Martin Lytton of The Everyman Writers Lab and I visited various Cheltenham organisations including P3's Montrose House, Kings Table, Cheltenham Open Door and also The George Whitfield Centre in Gloucester. People have been unbelievably generous in giving us their stories and poems and it has been a privilege to work with every one of them. Martin Lytton has worked hard at artfully shaping the play whilst keeping their exact words verbatim.

We are hugely grateful for the many men and women who have bravely allowed us to use their words and to the amazing staff and volunteers who work at these vital organisations. Thank you to Josh Jones and Caitlin Herbert of P3 in particular for your fabulous support and vision. Thanks to The Music Works for the musical score for the performance. We greatly Thank our funders, The Commissioners Fund, for enabling this project to happen and to the Diocese of Gloucester for sponsoring the performance. Thanks also to "The Times and The Sunday Times Cheltenham Literature Festival" for programming our performance.

I feel this project has been one of the most important of my career to date and I hope that through this work the voices of those people who are Homeless and Vulnerably Housed will be heard and that this book will be a catalyst to create debate and hopefully induce change for the better.

There has been a core group of four men who have gone the extra mile and have performed their work live, recorded it for the CD and worked hard on creating this book. We are indebted to David, Gary, Martin and Richard, Thank you.

Camille Cowe and Martin Lytton, The Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham.

(UN)HEARD

Invisible
Always unheard.
Am I crazy?
Am I human?
Inhuman?
Doubtful.
Dangerous?
Or do people just think that?
Homeless not soulless.
So depressing.
Do I have a future?
Where's hope?

(David, Gary and Martin)

[UN]HEARD

Script Editor: Martin Lytton

Images on screen. E.G. Posh restaurants, Lit-fest, graffiti, rough sleeper, tattoo etc etc. Music in background, changing from light to dark as the images get harder.

As each image appears a voice is heard – the opposite type of voice to the image.

Voice 1:

That's not me.

Voice 2:

That's not me.

Continue as needed until: Silence, and then:

Richard:

Imagine if you lost everything today: the people you love, the home you shared. Imagine losing your mind, having a breakdown – it's easier than you think to lose everything. Now imagine losing hope, the will to live.

Gary:

I lost my mum in 1998 and that's when my journey started. I had a good job, nice flat, money, car. Thought I had it all, but when I lost my mum life changed. I gave up everything because without my mum I had nothing, felt so lonely didn't want to go on so I donated everything – car, clothes, money. All of it, and just started walking and never stopped until I couldn't walk anymore. I just thought life was over. So many people lose so much from all walks of life. We don't choose to be homeless or have mental issues – it's just the hand we've been dealt.

Martin:

In Cheltenham, what you see on the High Street is only a little bit of the homeless lives... there's a lot of tents hidden. There's probably more homeless people in Cheltenham than you realise. A lot more.

Support worker:

Yes, what you see every day, out there on the street, is just the *visible*. I deal with, mostly, the invisible.

Woman:

...he was hitting me so I left, but there was no hostel, nothing like that, I mean I just upped and ran with the kids and I stayed with a friend and then another and I would never have made it into accommodation if it wasn't for my P3 worker.

Anon 1:

I was abused by my mum. My dad was sent to prison. This screwed me up more. I was homeless for eleven years struggling to feed myself. I was arrested on three occasions for stealing food – and one time it wasn't anything to do with me but a security guard just decided he didn't like me.

Gary:

I lived under a boat on Brighton beach. Only had a little bag. Slept under the boat, got out in the morning used to fight the seagulls for breakfast... anything lying around. One and a half years.

Anon 1:

I was homeless 11 years in Stroud. I was on Crack, heroin and alcohol. I felt nobody cared or gave a fuck about me. The whole reason I became homeless was rent arrears.

Martin:

I wish I could give money to people on the street but it prolongs their pain. I received so many sandwiches I gave them to other homeless. Dog food... I'd have trays of the stuff... I'd keep it upstairs at a shop nearby. There are some lovely people out there and they'd just stop and TALK to a homeless.

They'd notice that they have stories too. We'd just talk normal stuff. We call them regulars.

Support worker:

I'm not asking you to ignore it. Not asking you not to help. Just saying that a lot of help is... misdirected. Give money to the guy on the high street? Of course you do. You are generous. You want to help. But... where does that money go? Addiction, addiction, addiction. Our greatest enemy, *their* greatest enemy.

Martin:

Addicted? Think you don't know anyone. All right maybe not the drugs. Maybe not that. But shopping, fast cars? New clothes. Credit cards. Exercise even. Gambling. Think that's not addiction? I've worked at a lot of facilities. I've seen every sort. Every sort.

Gary:

I've never really done the addiction thing except... I was addicted to exercise. I bought this bike and I used to cycle a hundred miles a day, seven days a week, plus going to work. But not eating. So I went from 15 and a half stone down to 8 and a half. That was my self-harm. Still can't get back on a bike now. Ended up donating the bike to cancer research so they could sell it on.

Martin:

My background is I've got childhood issues. That's what started it all. I was homeless before I went to prison. I lost my family, home and everything. This was in...2003. Then I got three and a half years for selling drugs on the streets. That was the sentence. Served twenty-one months. Gloucester jail. Learned how to cook inside. In the kitchens. I was number one. Cooked for everyone every day, so got skills doing that, NVQ and everything. When I got out I moved to supported housing in Bristol. And stayed clean. 'Coz one of the big problems, before, cos, yeah I've been in prison before, like, was coming out and going straight back to Gloucester and all the same stuff was happening again. So I had to get away. And it worked. I was clean. For ten years. Ten years.

Support worker:

It's not unusual, unfortunately. We have clients that are really working hard to pull their lives together but then something happens and it can all fall apart.

Woman:

I mean, it's not a *choice* is it? But they say that I was voluntarily homeless. Because I ran. Because I couldn't take any more. Because it was stay and maybe, I don't know, be killed even, or run. With nothing. Think about it. Nothing. You have no idea what that is. Middle of the night. Jeans, hoody, converse daps and that's it. Didn't let me daughter even take her teddy because that was too risky. Think about it. Nothing.

Anon 3:

My background's totally different. I'm working, but homeless. What broke me was that my Nan died and then just a few weeks later, my babby in her cot. That's what started me on my journey... I've been working ten years and no-one, no-one, at work knows it. I go to swimming pools for showers and that. I go to laundrettes. I'm working so I've got money. No way I'm gonna accept handouts. No way I'm gonna beg. Can't do that whole thing sitting there and: 'You got a pound, mate?' That belittles me, know what I mean?

Martin:

But then I had a breakdown. I had a breakdown. Basically it was overwork... but there was a few incidents in those ten years that pushed me over the edge. Things I saw anyone should never see in their life time. And I woke up one morning and I didn't know where I was. Ten years of being clean and the only thing I knew to take away the nightmares was... well, I started drinking and taking drugs again.

Gary:

How did I end up there...? There was stuff going on in London so I went to Hastings... beautiful place, really full of atmosphere, you know, but spooky. Slept up in the ruins there. Do you know you don't hear birds singing up there? Spooky. But anyway, someone stole my shoes in Hastings and I had to go to Brighton so I walked the whole way barefoot. I used to sleep at night in these bushes with the rabbits. I'd stuff my feet down the holes in the middle of these bushes and in the morning I'd wake up and there'd be rabbits all around, you know, right up to my face and I was really hungry you know but it was just... I love nature. Being out in nature. I sat on the edge of Beachy Head, legs over the edge and lay back and went to sleep. But the view, that view looking out it was so.... peaceful.

Martin:

I lived for 20 months in a bus station in Gloucester. I had a dog, I'd rescued her – she'd been trained to fight – and because I had an animal I couldn't get housing, most of them won't take dogs. Well, I wasn't going to give her up, she's my baby. So I lived out.

Asian woman:

When you're homeless people look down on you. I am Asian. I have been here a long time. 18 years. I have been 6 months homeless because difficulties with rent arrears. Evicted. I ask different friends for help. So I moved from different friend to different friend's house. Maybe just one or two nights each time.

Richard:

I gave up work to care full time for my father when he was diagnosed with emphysema. They gave him a year to live. But he lived for six more. Mum got breast cancer that spread. She was given a year to live. She died within 11 months. We were living in a housing association bungalow in Gloucester. They said: 'When your mum dies it goes over to your father'. When dad dies I'm out. After their passing I had a month to sell everything. Didn't bother me. I'd lost my fiancé two years previous, now with my parents, my two towers of strength taken, I had nothing. The final part of what made me whole was shattered.

Asian woman:

There is a place called the Cavern. It is a safe place with mental health support workers. There is free tea and coffee until 11 o'clock at night. This last week I have been put in a B&B by the council. I have no family here. All abroad. Christian friends at church help me. My Christian friends give me sandwich and old clothes. I try to ask people to stay. I have slept out. Very scary. The fear is the most. Some sleep in the car park. Three of them together. If you are alone it is more scary. I always am alone. What would you do? I don't speak to my family. They know a bit that I am homeless. Some people help more. I have one black lady she help me most. Also one English Christian lady help me. George Whitefield Centre is Christian place. P3 help me a lot as well. Tonight I am in B&B. With a TV. I've never lived in a hotel before. Never. Now everyday I am live in hotel!

Richard:

I figured I'd drink myself to death in that month. As you can see, it didn't work. Neighbour called the doctor, doctor called Wotton Lawn. I was sectioned, sorted out to some extent. Released into respite care. Relapsed; sectioned; released; respite – notice a pattern here? That's how it goes when you've lost everything and everyone that matters to you. After my fifth section they decided to send me to rehab not respite. Six months in the rehab house then a year in a recovery house in Stroud. Sobriety made me see things very clearly. I still hated myself but I knew why I hated myself now.

Music Interlude

Martin:

The street – it's like a secret society of people who know each other. When you're homeless it's like you're in a clique. You have respect for each other. About 8 or 10 people sleeping around me. People saw me as someone to rely on. I always had an extra sleeping bag. I had a trolley with dog food, blankets. People used to say: 'Go to Martin, he'll have an extra blanket.'

Asian woman:

I hope to have nice place. Safe place to live. Quiet place you know. Because if you are a woman people can take advantage. You have to watch. Scary yes! I don't know yet what I will do. I worked in take-away. I'm 60 now. People can give food and clothes. Food is important. If you homeless, depression, then no nutrition makes depression worse. So food important. I'm not very good cook. I can cook fried rice. Beef and Black bean sauce. Asian people when they see you are homeless they look down on you. If you got money you are successful. If you have not got money they look down on you because you are not successful.

Martin:

I was attacked. They knocked me down, threw me into the road in front of a car and stamped all over my ankle. Got sent to hospital. They wanted to keep me in because my ankle... I couldn't walk on it at all. But I had my dog. I'd rescued her from fighting. She has a lot of issues. I can't leave her. No way I'd give her up. Went back on the street. Even though I couldn't walk or anything.

Gary:

I had to have massive surgery on my leg. The one was 7 inches shorter than the other. I'd done all that walking – barefoot – and so I kept bending the one foot up to compensate. That was 2013 I had that done. I was laid up for nearly twelve months. That changed my life. I didn't have teeth in my head then. All my teeth was... gums receding. You can't smile at anyone can you? I weren't eating properly either. So I was in supported housing for a year. They helped but they weren't really addressing the mental health stuff.

Richard:

Then, just when I thought I was starting to move forward a bit – you know, one step forward each day instead of ten steps back – two good friends I met in rehab died. They started using and drinking again. Ben was 33 and had a seizure in hospital and died instantly. Will was 31 and OD'd. Now I was alone again and the demons came back with a vengeance. I relapsed and was on the spiral dragging me down to the hell I knew. I knew so well.

Martin:

Then one day a P3 bloke came up and said 'Come on!' And he took me back to hospital and they'd got kennels for my dog, all paid for and everything, and I was able to go to hospital properly and get the leg seen to because of that.

Richard:

You think: Would it be better for me to just walk in front of a speeding car and end it all. I tried that – all I got was a broken shoulder and severe concussion – I remember walking out into the road – next waking up in a hospital with a mashed-up head.

Gary:

Things got so bad last year I went to Soal Junction, tied 200 lbs of bricks to my ankles and was prepared to jump in. Things get so hard sometimes. People say suicide is a coward's way out. Trust me, it's not.

Richard:

So they released me from hospital straight back onto the street. The freezing feeling of despair gripping your heart. The demons in your head screaming words of poison in your head. Dictating your day. The self-loathing – suicide opportunities everywhere you look.

Gary:

...and then I got the news about my daughter. She was only six. I tried... I tried to keep on at work but I couldn't really function. I'd keep breaking down. I'd be short-tempered with people and that's not very... Went back to the not-eating thing. Had to give the flat up because of the memories... had a lovely dog, had to give him up, couldn't look after myself. Ended up doing a spell in Wotton Lawn. When I come out I had nothing. No flat, no job, no money.

Music Interlude

Dave:

I've never actually been homeless – I'm really lucky in that respect. I mean, I'm warm, I've got a roof over my head... I'm in supported housing, so that's better than being on the street obviously. But, this place I'm in, I mean they put me right opposite an off-licence.

Gary:

It's definitely a step-up from being on the street. You're made to feel like you're nothing when you're out there. Government. Police. Doctor's will give you a pill but they haven't got time for you...

Support worker:

Getting proper, consistent long-term help is really difficult if you don't have a permanent address.

Anon 3:

For me, 'cos I'm working, I can afford clothes. I don't have a car, no house, nothing, but I buy good clothes like these North Face. Because they are good quality. Warm. It helps me to keep up a front, a mask. Got clean, good clothes; no-one's gonna think 'he's homeless', are they?

Martin:

In the ten years I was straight, in Bristol, I educated myself. I looked after clients overnight. I have a level 2 in medicine administration; I've also got diplomas in counselling and drug addiction studies. Before, I used to be a welder, but now I was using a computer and everything and I never thought I'd do that.

Dave:

I can't share everything with you. Some things have to remain private to protect the identity of those I love, and myself. Before my head injury in 2015 I was a functioning addict in a co-dependant relationship where I felt lonely and isolated. Basically, I was living only to please my partner. I had no sense of purpose, but still doing a very stressful job which I loved. Somehow I managed to separate my work from my personal problems. I was an addict and my drugs of choice were prescribed medication from my doctor, diazepam, and alcohol. I never used at work but my problems certainly affected my performance at times. This went on

for thirty years. I also used cannabis and MDMA recreationally. I probably tried most others but didn't like them very much. I have nothing against recreational drug use, unfortunately once it becomes a habit then it becomes a big problem. Why did I use drugs? Personally I used to temporarily escape from my negative thoughts and my feelings of loneliness, despair, fear, anger, sadness and pain. I simply could not deal with the relationship problems in my life.

Richard:

My time on the street was not sitting on my arse begging for change. I was looking for safe places to sleep for the night or hunting in bins, looking for dropped coins outside Moo-Moo's or Fever at 4 o'clock in the morning. I've found everything from pennies to twenty-pond notes! That would last me a month, two months. Bags of clothes outside charity shops where I found jeans and jumpers. I even found a pair of nearly new trainers. Just chucked in a bin by the Royal Well bus station. They lasted me six months!!

Martin:

It's like a learned behaviour, being on the street. It can be so much easier just to go back into that life if something should go wrong.

Joseph:

I don't even call myself homeless, even though I have been living out for the last thirteen and a half years. I prefer to say that I am living outside the grid. I have these routes that I walk. Even when I am staying in one place, which is never for long, I walk at least 12 miles a day, but often more. I never beg. I will do odd jobs, and I know where all the drop-in centres' are – or where they used to be. One time I walked from Birmingham to Stratford on Avon down the canal. That's 36 miles. In one day. No money, nothing to eat on the way, but it was ok because I knew they had a drop-in centre where you could get a meal in Scholars lane at the Salvation Army there. But when I knocked on the door they answered and said, sorry they had stopped serving meals. The council didn't think it appropriate for that sort of activity in the town. They were able to give me a little food parcel. There was nothing for it but to walk back to Birmingham.

Sam:

I was on the street for two weeks in March in Cheltenham. I suffer from PTSD, Anxiety and depression for ten years. Six years ago I left my family in the Middle East. So I had no support. I had my family to support me with my depression

which made it easier before. My dad passed away 3 years ago so that made it worse. Two friends of mine got arrested so my friend and I knew we were next to get arrested. So my friend and I booked a ticket to Heathrow. It was hard but it had to be done.

Gary:

Every day is about survival. Being where I am now, even though I do, you know, deserve to have help and have a roof, sometimes I prefer to be on the street. Having them four walls wrapped around you sometimes, because I spent so long on the street, and I love nature... so being inside, it feels a bit claustrophobic sometimes, so I literally have to get out. Because I don't know what's going to happen from day to day: I want good things to happen but it don't necessarily work out that way. I'm grateful for everything, but I still think somewhere in the back of my mind that I'll wake up and it won't be there.

Music Interlude

Dave:

It wasn't until everything was stripped away from me – and I had a lot before – It wasn't until then that I felt that I found I was really happy. Previously, I was materialistic and being in a co-dependant relationship was in the end destructive and which is what threw me into addiction in the first place. Having all that taken away, all those material things taken away, made me appreciate the simple things in life. Sunrise, the warmth of the sun on your face. Nature. Animals. Flowers. Music. All things like that.

Gary:

People say 'it's cold outside', but I love sitting outside and feeling the cold because you're alive aint' ya?

Sam:

My family didn't even know where I was going. I come from a minority back home so I couldn't tell my family as I knew they would be targeted by the Government and police. I went up North in England and worked there for two years and then decided to go to Uni so that's why I came to Cheltenham. I went to Uni for 6 months then I relapsed. I couldn't deal with my depression and I ended up on the streets for 2 weeks. Then I volunteered for a charity and they said I could

stay with them for a couple of weeks. Then I moved into a flat in Cheltenham and I stayed for a year and a half. Then I relapsed and couldn't deal with things because of depression. One day I woke up and found myself on the streets during the "Beast from the East" with my puppy. It was hard. 2 weeks. You can stay at a shelter from 9pm – 7am but after that you are on the streets. It was really tough. The shelter was going to be closed so I had to go to Gloucester but they don't allow dogs so I had to give up my dog. Someone from P3 looked after her for two days. I still have her.

Martin:

I was connecting with the P3 outreach team after my time in hospital. They brought me over here to Cheltenham and put me in an assessment centre. Because I have the dog and I won't give her up, it can be hard to find a place. But they did. I've got a basement flat, nice and big, even a bit of garden for the dog.

Richard:

I saw a poster for a place called Open Door where you could get meals – breakfast, lunch, even take-aways! No questions asked, everyone welcome. Having food regularly made me think differently – I used to look forward to my meals. People got to know me and I got to know them. I felt a part of something – this world of the have-nots. You can even get clothes there and have a shower as well. Heaven!!! Speaking of heaven, I found that a place called Trinity Church did meals on a Monday and Friday when Open Door were closed.

Gary:

It don't matter what you've got, how little. You're happy with what you've got.

Dave:

Life isn't about things. It's about experiences and meaningful relationships. I was chasing a dream for years and years and years and getting myself worse and worse. Now I'm at a stage when I'm in supported housing and I've got various problems that are going on, but I'm doing things with my life with purpose that I enjoy far more than when I was making money.

Gary:

Sometimes you've got to lose everything to realise how much you have left.

Dave:

The richest people, the poorest people, all our feelings are exactly the same. Mine were ... I was angry... resentful and sad. All because of a failed relationship. That was what was important. I don't really miss the four-bed-roomed house, the cars and the supposedly fantastic job.

When I was in supported housing, we used to sit outside on a bench in Gloucester, opposite P3, and listen to music in the sunshine. That was lovely and something that bonded us all.

Anon 3:

You know what? We're brought up to be selfish. Selfish. But I know now that it's sometimes better just to give someone a tenner and say 'Take it. Don't want nothing back or anything but do something that puts a smile on your face, that's all.'

Support worker:

A lot of people presume that it's all bad days – for clients and, to some extent, for us, that are working with them. But there are inspirational moments also.

Joseph:

Small stuff becomes big and important: like not having access to a decent pair of shoes. I was doing one of my canal walks and I'd got a pair of shoes from a distribution centre, a day centre, and they didn't last more than about 15 miles. They began to disintegrate. And I was thinking to myself that if I had the means I could just go into a shop in Droitwich or Bromsgrove – not very much, just a good second hand pair, but all I had in my pocket was about 75 pence – which a loaf of bread – and I thought I'm not getting rid of these boots because then I'll have to walk barefoot so I asked someone on a barge 'Excuse me do you have any gaffer tape?' And he said "We've got loads, what do you want it for?" I said "To repair my shoes so I can walk on to my friend's house."

You see, if the shoes you are wearing are the *only* shoes you have got, if the clothes on your back are the *only* clothes you have: if you lose anything you are in desperate trouble. You suddenly go into this different world. Nothing else matters.

Gary:

Even if you haven't got stuff you can find it if need be. This Polish guy got beaten up when I was in Brighton. He died. There was nothing in the papers about it. This was only two or three boats down from where I was staying. So when it was his funeral there was all these homeless people turned out for it. Just loads and loads – it was unreal. I don't think anybody knew till then just how many there were in Brighton. Anyway we'd all gone up and down the beach collecting things coins and jewellery and tobacco just all sorts of bits and they put 'em in a, you know, like a keepsake box, and they said 'Go on, bury this with him.'

Joseph:

You get sort of used to not having anything. I spent a year once with no money. I was volunteering and I was getting food but not paid, this was with a church and it was linked to homelessness issues, so I spent all that time with no money and it was really quite punishing never being able to buy even a pint of milk. Then I met this one guy I hadn't seen for a long time and he said "How are you doing?" so I told him what I was doing, that I had something to eat everyday and company and so on... and he got a two-pound coin out of his pocket and he said "I've known you a long time and I know you'd normally refuse this, but as a friend I just want to give it to you, and I burst into tears. It was just total kindness on his behalf.

Music Interlude

Martin:

I've given up taking drugs. ...I'm still an alcoholic though, but months now without touching the drugs... I've reduced my methadone script. I want to prove, to show that I am willing and able to change, to turn things around. I'm eating a lot healthier. I've put on weight.

Support worker:

People think of the homeless problem as being, like, 'Too big. Where would I start?' but sometimes just doing the little things, the small gesture, just talking to someone. Small things that everyone can do to make someone else's life a bit better.

Gary:

Getting a group of people together and being able to talk about our stories. That's an achievement.

Support worker:

And it helps others to hear it, definitely.

Dave:

Sometimes it's only when you begin to feel stronger in yourself that you're able to start asking for help. For years I never received any mental-health help at all. I'm still struggling to get that now.

Support worker:

It is very difficult to get support for mental health problems if you are experiencing addiction issues; if you are homeless as well, then it becomes next to impossible.

Joseph:

I know a guy, and for him prison is like his support network. If things get really hard on the street, in Winter, say, when it's minus eighteen, he'll do something... stupid that'll get him three months just so that he won't freeze to death or starve to death. It's like his insurance policy.

Support worker:

Yes, I have a client, a lady, who will do that. She feels unsafe on the streets, so she'll create a public order offence just to get locked up for the night. To be safe. All the police know her.

Richard:

When the temperature falls to zero or below there's a place down the lower High Street they call CCP, they open it up and turn it into a makeshift night shelter – somewhere lovely and warm to curl up for the night. In the morning the P3 people come in for a chat. It was there I got talking to Emma and, long story short, she persisted with me until I filled in a homeless application.

Martin:

P3 took a big risk when they took me in with a dog – I don't think they've done it in this area before. So it was a learning curve for them, a learning curve for me. I'm happy in my flat down there. And now my ultimate goal is to go back to work, to use the qualifications I have. Maybe start by volunteering and see where that takes me. But for now, well, I still have them demons, still have them, so one day at a time.

Gary:

There has so many times I've felt empty and alone and unsure if I will get through my journey but the memory of my wonderful mum and my beautiful princess kept me from, I guess, just giving up and leaving this earth to make way for someone who is worthy of this precious time we have on this earth. My journey will never end; my depression, my anxiety, and my joy at still being alive and to use my experiences and what I've learnt to maybe help other people on the journey. Everyday is a challenge. This project has been amazing. Giving me hope for the future. The people I've met are my true family. The amazing people at Open Door have shown me that I am worth something and the Everyman Theatre for giving us the chance to say how it really is. We're all human. I hope people will gain a more understanding of homeless people and the many reasons why we've ended up there. Don't judge us. Try to understand us. We are human after all. We have feelings like anybody else so next time you see somebody on the street please don't judge us – stop and ask yourself why. Stop and talk to them. We come from all walks of life, from master craftsman to doctors and lawyers. Mental health is a major part of it all, so next time just offer your time and help. We are all worth it.

Joseph:

This guy, eventually I took him to this church in Birmingham, St Martin in the Bullring and they've got this group which introduces homeless to the arts, acting, drama, music. They referred him to another group that found him some housing. Once he'd got that, once he got the opportunity for stability, he completely transformed himself. Last time I saw him he was a different man. He'd even got himself an equity card and is working. Totally transformed. Before that he said that all that he'd expected for himself was to go to prison or die on the street. He'd never asked himself 'Is there anything that I'd like to do?' because he didn't think he *could* do much, or that he deserved to do much. Now he's got a purpose, at last.

Richard:

I feel something that I haven't felt for a long, long, time – the stirrings of that sweet sensation called hope. I'm in supported housing, I've a room in a shared house. I'm on meds now for the depression and I can't even remember the last time a suicidal thought tainted me. I can have a nice soak in the bathroom next to my bedroom. I do gardening and am starting a course soon. I still live by the same mantra I had on the street – one day at a time, one hour at a time. Somehow I'm still here and I've got another chance.

Dave:

When I had my pension stolen I went to Trinity Church, to Kings Table there, the Trinity Church, and they fed me physically, then emotionally and spiritually! Those lovely volunteers at Kings Table helped me so much. I can't thank them enough.

Gary:

The people I've met on my journey are truly an inspiration to me and gave me the strength to battle on. I don't think I'll ever totally recover – it's part of me – but hopefully I can help people as people eventually helped me, which I thank them from the bottom of my heart. Recently I've joined a place called Open Door. They helped me to feel part of something and given me some self-worth. I've a lot to thank them for and I'll do so for many years to come. Be strong. You're never on your own. God bless.

Support worker:

It would be wonderful if, at this point, we could simply say 'The end' and it would be the end. We all know it isn't. However – if there is one thing I hope we can take with us from this space this evening it is this; that never again will we look at one another across a street and say 'That's not me.' Because it is.

Photography by Paul Floyd Blake



THE REAL CHELTENHAM

Behind the scenes.

People think it's an affluent community.

People with a lot of money.

But there's people struggling.

Mental health problems.

Drug problems.

Alcohol problems.

People who need help.

All my mental health problems.

Covered up by my addiction.

That's why I use.

Because of my abuse.

To numb the pain.

(Martin)

UNHEARD WOMEN

There's sex workers,
Prostitution.
Immigrants,
They pay for their journey.
Get stuck in that cycle.
Grotty houses.
They get used and abused.
It's despicable
But it goes on.
You don't see that.
Homeless,
Drug addiction,
Alcohol addiction.
I just wanna be free.

(Anon)

GARY'S POEM

My time.

How I've spent it.

Or Have I?

Life is like a limited bank account.

You take out when you need to.

But what if you haven't got?

I absorb other people's pain.

WHY?

Because it eases mine.

Am I really here.

Or am I just a thought?

Ups and downs, just like a lift:

But will I ever reach the top floor?

(Gary)

Shadow by Gary



MY HAND

Today my hand writes steadily,
Once my hand held a bottle ashamed.
One day my hand will touch a gentle soul,
Now, my hand will never cause distress.
Someone else's hand may touch mine,
I wish my hand could feel that now.

(David)

MAGIC BOX

A humble driftwood box washed up on soft, distant lands.
A soul full of values and beliefs,
Within my walls are honesty, kindness and peace.
A place to stay, find love and integrity,
There is no room for perfection, injustice and abuse.
Just purposeful relationships and experiences,
No things. Magic.

(David)

HOME

A soulless place and a constant reminder.
Drugs dangerous as a killer shark.
Laundry discarded like a vacant squat.
Walls depressing and bare as grey rain.
An office for support left empty and uncaring.
Rubbish strewn desolate like the last place on Earth.
Ghosts preying on the vulnerable.
Flat 5, a sanctuary within this madness.
Discover soon my escape.

(David)

ME

How can they understand? Half my age and no history of addiction or
mental health.

Doing NVQ's but that doesn't help as life experience is priceless.
No wonder all services are getting slagged off, lack of experience it
makes all the difference. Scary how many people are getting wrong
information. Be an addict for twenty or thirty years then you will
understand what we go through every day. A NVQ or college course
won't give you experience.

(Anon)

ADDICTION

The Voice in my head tells me I'm rubbish,
The Images keep me up all night,
I've had enough
so I use.
It steals everything,
Values gone,
Emotions and feelings suppressed,
No Joy,
No Happiness,
No Self Care.
Hopeless.
Faithless.
I am not myself,
I am not me.
Fear,
Secrets,
Resentment.

(David, Martin, Caitlin and Kerry)

FREEDOM

The Voice in my head tells me I'm rubbish,
The Images keep me up all night,
I've had enough
But I choose to not use.
One day at a time,
One foot forward,
Slowly recovery.
Glimmers of Joy,
Of Happiness,
Of Peace.
Self-esteem.
Moments of Integrity,
Time to forgive and accept.
Slowly, slowly,
Rays of hope grow every day,
Waves of feelings and emotion,
Excitement,
Opportunity,
Energy,
Peace,

Friends and family.

Connected.

Faith.

I am myself again.

(David, Martin, Caitlin and Kerry)

SEE ME

You say I'm here to steal your jobs

That's not me.

You say I put myself here on the streets

That's not me.

You say I choose to be addicted

That's not me.

You say I should snap out of it

That's not me.

You say I do it because I'm a slut

That's not me.

You say I'm a screaming scrounger, I claim your hard-earned cash

That's not me.

You say I'm lazy

That's not me.

You say I'm faking it

That's not me.

You say I'm a bad mum

That's not me.

You make me be what you want me to be

But that's not me.

(Martin, Josh, Caitlin and Kerry)

YOUR FANTASY IS NOT MY STORY 1.

In the bus station

Unshaven

Wet

Dirty

Smelly

You feel sorry for me

But you walk away.

You think it's my fault

Assume I put myself here

Intentionally homeless

My choice.

The dog by my side

You think I should give her up

You think I use her as my payticket

You think that's unfair.

(Martin, Josh, Kerry and Caitlin)



YOUR FANTASY IS NOT MY STORY 2.

In the bus station

I know you see me

Unshaven

Wet

Dirty

Smelly

Your looks make me more disgusted with myself. I watch you walk away

I am dirt to you

I am dirty

I try to be clean.

I remember the gun put to my face

I couldn't stay

Fear for my life.

So I'm here

With my dog, my baby

I rescued and nurtured her before the streets.

I do my best.

(Martin, Josh, Kerry and Caitlin)

MARTIN'S NIGHTMARES

Sat here again 1.30 am
Another sleepless night
Worried about sleeping.

Nightmares, flashbacks
Complex PTSD my life
Before the streets.
The kicking I took
With all my broken bones
Strangled in my sleep
While in my bag
Belt around my neck
Stabbed in eye and face
Ears cut with scissors

The horrific attack
While at my pitch
Shattered ankle:
That's just a small part
Of why, still here,
Night after night
Just drinking to forget
And fall asleep
Might get an hour or two
Then awake again, nightmares
Life
Not just on streets, but growing up.
Will it ever end?

(Martin)

I AM...

I am a computer network analyst

I have material things

Married

A 4 Bedroom House,

A Car,

A stable job,

All you can dream of,

But I'm selling my soul.

Lost.

Lonely.

Everyone around me wants something.

But my values are simple.

Money doesn't buy happiness.

(David)

I AM...

I am a Support Worker, I have a Diploma and letters after my name

But

I'm trying to fit in.

Trying to belong.

Always told I'd amount to nothing.

I have feelings and emotions I can't handle

I have to escape

I have to get away

But now I'm Society-less

(Martin)

I AM...

People don't know us
They just think we are bums.
But behind every bum there's a story.
Stop and Ask.
Before you sigh and groan
Before you judge
Read the story
Don't judge a book by the cover.

(Martin, David, Kerry and Caitlin)

I AM...

I am squeezed dry
In every sense
In heart and soul
And pound and pence.

(Caitlin)

ANIMAL

Alcoholic at 16

When drinking I was angry

An Angry Grizzly bear

Fighting at the weekends

Then Free parties in Oxford

On Ecstasy tablets

I was a Cuddly teddy bear.

People jumping in and out of cars

Getting massages

It changed my whole aspect

E's on top of drinking

I was a big cuddly bear.

Earrings in my lip and nose.

When I took heroin

I was a nasty sly fox

I'd do anything to rip anyone off.

Took heroin to bring myself down,

So I could go back to work.

People use it as a downer.

I used to neck bottles of brandy too
I had the break down
Someone did me a line of heroin and I found my nirvana.

(Martin)



ME AND MY DAUGHTERS' STORY

I used to shut the door and I felt safe.

I do my own thing.

I clean a lot.

When I'm drinking

I create shit.

I'm paranoid.

When I go to town I go crazy.

It's a blackout.

Everyone hates me.

I don't want to come out for days.

I keep the door shut again.

It's a cycle.

I was sad when I went to prison.

I need to be controlled.

I was safe.

I only wanted her
She's my motivation.
If I didn't have her I would be dead.
I get letters from her once a year.
She's part of me.

I was only on the streets for one night.
I slept in a doorway with a quilt.
I felt sorry for people who do it every day.

When I get timed out
I've got nowhere to go.
I get drunk and get nicked.
I felt safe.
The police kept me safe.

In jail I would write poetry.
Just copying other poems from books.

(Anon)

THE PEOPLE...

The people in the local streets I don't want to feel them
Being near them is close enough I don't get them
I don't prick the bubble of them
There is a pavement a shop a cafe and that's everywhere
Would you feel inspired by this or feel spite toward it
I can't vomit the outward in and they can't become an ingested thing
I only see the sky for what it is and the non humans for what they are
But the humans around me
I don't get them.

(Caitlin)

ME?

Confused?

Tired?

Misunderstood?

Low life?

Pond Scum?

Angry?

Unheard?

Lonely?

Will it ever change?

Bum?

Waste of Space?

Is this it?

My future?

Only I can change.

(Martin)

THEY FAILED

They failed to protect me from theft of my personal possessions

They failed to protect me from psychological abuse

They failed to protect me from emotional abuse

They failed to protect me from physical abuse

They failed to protect me from financial abuse

They failed to protect me from verbal abuse

They failed to protect me from The Bailiffs

They failed to provide contracted support

They failed to man the support office

They failed to provide the proper information

They failed to observe interviews by the Police.

They failed to protect me from noise and insomnia.

They failed to protect me from other addicts.

They failed to protect my vulnerabilities
They failed to protect me from isolation
They failed to provide compassion
They failed to safeguard me
They failed to support me
They failed to nurture me
They failed to protect me
They failed to educate me
They failed to advise me
They failed to listen

They tried but they failed to evict me.
They failed to provide the evidence to the Court to do so.
They failed to respond to my Defence.
They failed.

(David)

TRASPASS
ECHO TEC

Please help me to raise
£15 For a Safe and
clean place to sleep
Thank You + God Bless x



GENEROUS

They give more generously when it's cold
And I'm sitting shrivelled in the park;
Their purses the opposite of flowers –
Opening in the frost –
And they pour hot liquid on my roots
Watch me not wilt,
My pinched face open because they spread
Their manure on my patch,
Dig it in with the spade of sympathetic words
Hoping something will grow out of it

For them.
For they feel good now,
Having shed the warm coat of guilt –
Left it at the door of an office
Where weather is not a flesh-grabbing lecher
Using its unassailable position
To demean, control,
Put its hand in places no cold hand should be
Laughs if you complain:
Who would listen anyway?
Who will give their understanding freely
When understanding can be bought
With coins and caffeine;
their tinsel, my tree.

And so we sit, caught in our faux-festivities –
The roofed with their complaints
Of ‘earlier every year’,
And me, in my perpetual winter park,
Brown and white,
Nurtured by their gifts.

(Martin Lytton)

UNHEARD

People eyes down texting.
Or on their phones – business deals.
Couples bickering.
Parents urging kids to hurry past
And not to stare at “that person”.
People talking to the air –
Are they talking to me?
I notice the wires,
No, handsfree.
Legs bustle past
I hear fragments of their busy lives
I sit for hours, motionless.
Concrete seeps into my bones
Stiffens my joints.
I say nothing.
That which is unspoken burns within.
Eats at the person I was.
Soon there will just be a shell
Caving in on itself.

Crumbling to dust.

Unless...

Are they talking to me?

(Camille Cowe)

HOME?

My new “sanctuary”

A Room of my own.

Shared kitchen.

Shared Bathroom.

I have a key

Lock myself in.

Lock myself out.

Mould on the wall.

Paint peeling off windows

Pins on the floor.

Blood on the mattress.

2am Banging on the door

Users yelling on the stairs

24-7.

Door smashed in.

Phone nicked.

Money nicked.

Food pinched out the fridge.

Everything nicked

Except my clothes.

Addicts all thrown together.

Off licence opposite.

Pubs along the street.

Doomed to relapse

To escape this hell
A prisoner in my bedroom.
Surrounded but Alone.
Hyper vigilant.
Insomnia.
Exhausted by fear.
Unsupported housing.
Never Manned.
My home!
Should I return to the streets?

(Camille Cowe)

CHELTENHAM SPA – SEEN AND UNSEEN?

A Spa Town
Majestic copper domes
Limestone spires.
The Promenade
Montpellier
Regency Buildings
Wine bars
Boutiques
Rolexes worth 4 grand, behind thickened glass.
The Caryatids – armless sculpted ladies watching over
Tourists
Shoppers
In the posh end.
A few steps away
Rough sleepers with nicotine fingers.
Beggars with thin sleeping bags and mobile phones.
Bright blue tents pop up next to gravestones
In the heart of the town
Where Sundays worshippers walk hurriedly past
Greasy spoons
Betting shops
Money lenders
Dark Alleyways
Where children pick their way through

Needles and syringes on their walk to school.
Silhouettes sheltering in railway arches.
Areas avoided by many,
Yet there is character here.
Kind words from an alcoholic
Banter at the veg stall.
Languages weave from shop doorways
Support from the generations of families that remain
There is community here
There are two sides to every coin.
This supposed jewel of the Cotswolds has impurities.
But there is spirit in the lower end
That should be celebrated.
Cheltenham Spa – seen and unseen.

(Camille Cowe)



STREET MONOLOGUE

Spare some change? Have a good day.

That whispercallsongshoutscream says I'm coming angel darling honeysmear wait for me just stay there one more minute fucking love of my life give me what I need good bad sane mad all the moods injected into one long tightening narrow kiss and waiting waiting she won't show she never does the brokenpromised lying witch so search her out that's her game everyfucking day to wait behind the sheds bins dumpsters hiding nerves closed clenched not wanting to open until the counting is done counting counting the slashes of synapse that cut an hour away from her tangled loveplay ninety-nine one hundred ready notready coming anyway found you tagged you you're it.

Yes, it's cold today. Thank you.

She wears stiletto daggers she wears a white dress brown she wears nothing but the rancid morning or lip-sick night and I can suck her tit and the juice just flows I can disappear up her hole wet warm and forever and she moves like a bitch in heat so fast you can't help chasing and when you mount her she moans like a demon and the greatfucking orgasm is all the love you need for a lifetime and then of course she needs you more and whipped dog you chase again rollover all fours beg.

Thank you madam have a good day. Cheers.

There was window open last night I took because my love needs presents presence always present and she can't be bought or sold just the things I get her can be must be all the time passing through my hands like powders of lost wisdom taking my memory from happy times weird times sad times or whatever those times were before she met me and fucked me good and hard her five gram fingers jerking the hours out turning my future into unrelenting past. Got any coins? Cheers anyway.

At night in the bag I'll lay alone but not really because she'll be there beside but she doesn't like to be woken up gets vicious at three in the morning so let her be let your eyes stay shut your mind cold your body frozen earth against the spade of her desire and hope no other bastard digs her out she'll be fine then and waiting for me when I wake troubled but ready always ready because that's how she is at dawn in sweetcup syrup coffee and two litre cola and so godamighty fat the pavement cracks under her weight and you just slip through hiding in the jagged bits they threw away when they made daybreak.

For a place in a hostel. Thanks, very kind.

Like to meet her no thanks don't you bring that back here not my house you little bastard it's out for you sixteen years old first a friend's sofa to sleep with her and then the friend's got rules and you've got just the one and one enforcer so it's the street because she's your queen now and her realm doorways car-parks skips and her crown glitters in the rubbish and her armies parade through everytown and I know she loves me more than them and them more than me but I am one and my uniform shows my loyalty and she rewards me eight times a day ten does yours do that for you?

Bless you. Thanks. Black four sugars. Yes, I know. Thanks.

Had to run but not from her that's another story the bloke who reckoned she was his to own alone and jealous of me or something came for me knife and strap and would've had me but I ran even with her clinging to me not wanting me to go but it's ok even in another town she found me straight away because that's who she is a passion so strong love so binding that distance cells weakness hunger won't stop her coming for you and taking you as you want to be taken and giving you all you need in the fucking goddamn bright light of everyday and booted nonsense of stomping night.

A note! Bless you. Have a good day.

I tattoo her name on arms legs wrists ankle belly all the places a lover sees and feels and caresses and she rubs herself against me deep black soothing black running with the dogs of flesh satisfying the meatcraving lust for the sexhigh

brilliant consuming blindmotion stillness that comes and comes with the shriek of streets writhing in the deadlust of asphalt and diesel and legs so wide you pass between them unnoticed except by her thighflesh highflesh slack with the cellulite of godsown fat.

Pastie? Thank you, thank you. God bless Greggs.

I'm her statue pieta held holey-bodied in the arms of whoremadonna weeping meth as she strikes moulds scrapes engraves faith on the shape of my ghost as I haunt the revenant space between hits and snickets sculptor and subject marble hammer chisel stone cast like dreams over the smashed base of my life broken brokenbritained brokenhousing brokenhomed brokenchildhood brokenmarraige brokenhearted lostinfuckinglove lovelost but she finds me lets me find her everywhichtime whitesmiling toothed like a snowfucking leopard stalking me down the high passes and the low pounce and bite but the bite whitechrist the bite is the fang of passion blood redemption all the sins washed in the great tide that rises rides arcs and greater love than this has no man than he who syringes his soul for his lover.

(Martin Lytton)

EVERYMAN

THEATRE · CHELTENHAM



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you see or meet someone who is homeless or you suspect is homeless, send an alert to *Streetlink*. You can call them on 0300 500 0914, visit streetlink.org.uk or if you have a smart phone, download the *Streetlink app*.

Stop and have a chat or just say hello.

For more information visit www.p3charity.org

Front and back cover illustrations: Richard Carpenter

Design: Neil Morgan Design

“The project has given me a new sense of worth and an opportunity to speak out and hopefully help other people on their journeys. Thanks to the Everyman Theatre and P3. Thank you.”

(Gary)

“Since I’ve been part of this wonderful project I have grown-up a lot. It’s been a rocky road, full of emotions and feelings which at times has taken me back to dark times of my life. I’ve learnt that I can be creative writing poems and it’s helped me get some of my STUFF out. Working with everyone has been a pleasure and had enabled me to work through my fear of being around people. I’ve got a long way to go but so has this project and I hope to be part of that journey. It’s been a pleasure working with everyone. Long may we continue. It’s certainly allowed me to grow as a person and get in touch with my creative side. I luv all who have contributed and lets carry it on. Thank you for allowing me to be part of it.”

(Martin)

