



**CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS
FOR PEOPLE WORKING TO LEAVE
HOMELESSNESS BEHIND.**

Cork Simon Community
September 2020

A Working Life: The Continuing Journey

Challenges and achievements for people working to leave homelessness behind.



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September 2020

“I don't give up; we must move on.”

- Research participant

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

A Working Life is a longitudinal research series which explores the experiences of people as they move into employment with support from Cork Simon's Employment and Training Team and tracks their progress over two years. All research participants were currently, recently, or at risk of homelessness at the time they started work¹.

The research series aims to identify the difference that working makes to these participants lives, challenges they faced and factors that helped and hindered them to sustain work in the short and long-term.

39 in-depth interviews were conducted with a participant group of 18 people over two years.

The research is presented in two parts. Part one was released in October 2019 with a paper called *A Working Life: The Early Days*; it focused on the 18 participants initial weeks in employment.

Part 2, detailed in this paper, *A Working Life: The Continuing Journey*, reports on the continuing journeys of 14 of the participants with whom contact was maintained over a two-year period. This paper also contains a brief update on the impact of Covid19 restrictions on some of the participants lives.

Summary of findings:

The research finds impressive achievement, often against the odds, among participants. 71% were still in employment up to 24 months after starting work and 76% of goals noted by participants in their first interview were achieved during the research period – a testament to the commitment and determination of the participants.

Work can instigate life change; some participants describe stark contrast between 'life before' and 'life after' work. The benefits of work including gaining independent housing, and social and psychological change, including improved social integration, self-esteem, identity and the ability to manage problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling. Work can also be a sanctuary for participants, a safe-haven from their troubles.

The research finds that a myriad of factors relating to the individual, the work environment and the external environment contribute to the sustaining of work. These factors are inter-related; a problem or an upturn in one area can influence another area.

The main factors to impact participants ability to work were housing scarcity and instability and physical well-being. While securing housing brought great relief and joy, housing insecurity caused considerable stress and upheaval and impacted one-third of participants' ability to work. More than half of participants rated their physical health lower at final interview compared to first interview and illness, injury and strain, to varying degrees, posed challenges to sustaining work.

¹ 56% were currently homeless and staying in emergency accommodation; 32% had experienced homelessness within the last two years and 11% were staying in temporary insecure accommodation and were at risk of homelessness.

However, participants show resilience, realism and ability. When returning to work, the majority took physically challenging, low skilled and low paid work. As the research progressed many changed jobs, many were promoted and many improved the skill level of their work. By final interview, the majority wished to again transition, in some case to improve finances, and in some cases to move to more physically suitable work.

Many participants' changing goals, coupled with the development of friendships and activities and family relationships, reflect new aspirations and a sense of 'living' rather than 'surviving'.

Figure 1-1 The difference working makes



1.2 Main Findings

1. 71% of participants maintained their employment.

Among the 18 participants who took part in the research, contact was maintained with 14 for between 10 and 24 months.

10 of these 14 participants, or 71%, were still in employment at final interview - up to 24 months after starting work.

The average rate of employment among this group was 90%.

2. Work can instigate life change.

The overarching motivation for working among participants, as identified in Report 1, was to instigate life change. Work was seen by participants as holding the potential to driving change in areas of life including housing, finances, family relationships and self-esteem.

Many participants proved to be realistic in their hopes and aspirations; many experienced significant life change and as the research progressed, three-quarters of goals identified when starting work were achieved.

For some participants, work sparked transformation in their lives with stark contrast between 'life before' and 'life after' work. For others, if work was not altogether transformative, the positive effects of work were plentiful and all participants, including those unemployed at final interview, reported positives to working. The main positive differences that working made to participants lives were social and psychological, including:

- Developing new identities, including re-discovering one's self.
- Developing independence in terms of housing, finances and control over one's life.
- Improved social health, achieved through social integration - feeling a part of society, through positive rapport and often friendships with colleagues and through improved or deepened family relationships and the fulfilment of family related goals.
- Improved mental health, achieved through routine, structure and meaningful use of time, and manifesting in improved confidence, optimism and self-esteem, and improved ability to manage problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling.

It's made a huge difference. It really has. It's like two different worlds. I feel like I'm back in the land of the living. It's been life changing really.

3. A myriad of factors relating to the individual, the work environment and the external environment contribute to the sustaining of work.

Some factors helped participants sustain work while others could challenge their ability to keep working. These factors are inter-related; a problem or an upturn in one area can influence another area with links found in particular between housing, mental health, problematic alcohol or drug use or gambling, and resilience.

The main factors to challenge participants ability to sustain work were physical ill-health and housing insecurity. The most common factors to help sustain work were the mental health benefits of working, fostered in particular through positive rapport with colleagues.

Secure housing is greatly valued and appreciated by participants but once attained, appears to settle into the background of their lives, as they focus on re-building their lives. However, if secure housing was lacking or threatened, it was felt acutely and could have serious implications for sustaining work.

Factors that threaten the sustainability of work:

- Housing insecurity and homelessness
- Physical ill health (illness, injury and strain)
- Problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling
- Insufficient financial return
- Poor mental health

Factors that helped sustain work:

- A positive work environment including supportive management, good rapport with colleagues and opportunities to learn and develop skills

- The social and mental health benefits of working
- Support from the Employment and Training Team
- Personal Characteristics:
 - Motivation
 - Realistic attitude
 - Resilience
 - Work ethic

4. Lack of affordable, long-term housing is a significant barrier to life progression.

While the percentage of participants in independent housing (private rented accommodation and social housing) increased as the research progressed, by final interview safe, secure and affordable housing remained an unresolved issue for 50% (n.7) of participants – two thirds of whom were in employment at final interview.

While employment enabled 50% (n.7) of participants to secure private rented accommodation during the research, 36% (n.5) of participants also lost private rented accommodation during the research period. The net increase in private rented tenancies recorded from first to final interview was just two.

Tracking participants housing experiences over the course of the research highlights the challenges of finding and keeping affordable and secure private rented accommodation. The main challenges were lack of affordable and available housing and insecurity of tenure. Housing insecurity caused considerable stress for many participants and there was a sense of weariness and diminishing hope among some in their struggle to secure appropriate, independent housing.

One third of participants experienced housing difficulties which directly or indirectly challenged their ability to work. These ranged from homelessness (staying in emergency accommodation or rough sleeping) to a housing crisis (an urgent need to find alternative accommodation) to the effects of housing insecurity (including increased problematic alcohol or drug use and deteriorating mental and physical health).

We were there about half an hour before the viewing and there was literally a queue outside the door. It's very hard. Like we both have full time jobs and we work five days a week and even one bed apartments, we still can't afford them and paying bills then like... it's just madness.

5. Work can be a double-edged sword in terms of health.

At the time of moving into work, 100% of participants reported 'good' or 'very good' physical health. However, as the research progressed, many participants experienced physical health issues with some suffering serious illness or injury, including heart attack and slipped discs. By final interview 42% of participants had downgraded their physical health rating to 'ok' or 'poor'.

Almost one third of participants connected their work with their deterioration in physical health. Some experienced work-place injuries, others suffered work-related strains and one participant associated his work environment with aggravating a health concern. Sometimes

these deteriorations were the impact of long-term work, rather specific work in the period of the research.

Participants physical health impacted their ability to work in varying degrees ranging from a need to transition to more physically suitable work, to an inability to work.

All, however, identified strong social and psychological benefits to working and all but one, who was physically unable to work at the time of final interview, planned to continue working.

The amount of pain I have to absorb while I'm working. I've got tennis elbows in both my elbows at the moment. That's draining me. I'm cold every day; touching steel with your bare hands is not a nice sensation. In my own body I can feel myself getting weaker.

Without a shadow of a doubt. Course I will [continue working]. I don't even like taking days off work. See if I can pick up any new trades along the way. There must be an easier way of doing things.

6. Work counteracts social exclusion

The experience of homelessness is often accompanied by feelings of social isolation and social exclusion². The most commonly identified 'best part' of work among the research participants was the enjoyment of good relations with colleagues. Good relations at work offer participants a sense of inclusion, social connections and often friendship. They also offer a positive atmosphere or environment, which can be respite from accommodation or mental health challenges.

There's a brilliant banter between us all. We get on so well; we're after becoming best of friends and we meet up as much as possible.

7. Working helps manage problematic drug / alcohol / gambling use

50% of participants said working helped them to manage their use of alcohol, drugs or gambling. For those who it helped, it helped significantly. Among the seven participants who said that working helped them to manage their alcohol, drug or gambling use, the majority rated the positive impact of work in helping them to manage their use as 10 out of 10 (on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing maximum positive effect).

It stopped me from drinking. It basically did like. I think, because I looked forward to going in to the job, that I didn't want to be f**king anything up so I was saying what's the point of going drinking

8. Work can be a sanctuary

Work is a sanctuary for some participants - a place where they are distracted from their thoughts, their worries, their loneliness. In some cases, participants throw themselves into work as a short-term coping mechanism during emotionally intense times. In a minority of

² Finnerty, J. (2018) *Last Resort: Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Quality of Life in a Homeless Population*. Cork Simon Community.

cases, participants use of work as a refuge from life is a more long-term coping strategy. In these cases, participants worked excessive hours, potentially pushing their bodies too far.

I was losing myself in work. In a sort of a therapeutic way, I suppose. Threw myself into the work anyway.

9. Financial difficulty for over one third

By final interview, one third of participants reported they were still struggling financially - they were *'just about getting by'* or *'finding it quite difficult'*. Three of these five participants were in employment and were planning to change jobs for financial reasons; two were in receipt of Unemployment Benefit.

I try to find new job - better job. But I don't want to move to another job to be a General Operative in another place for the same wage. Maybe I will [not] have the safety of the permanent job. I'm looking and every day, I send my CV, but no response.

10. Many participants were capable, keen-to-learn employees with good interpersonal skills.

50% of participants were promoted. The quality of participants' work is also reflected in positive feedback from managers and customers and in two participants' experiences of being 'head-hunted'.

Participants are keen to learn and progress; over 50% of participants engaged in training during the course of the research; three gained training through their work and five pursued training external to work.

The majority of participants report positive, constructive relationships with colleagues and managers. They fit in well. They enjoy this social aspect of work and most commonly identify good relations with colleagues as the 'best part' of work.

Just like, now, I can order the meat. I knows what has to be thrown out, what has to be taken out, what has to be used today. Like when we get a new trainee, they makes me train them in. It's good to have that work as well and I got a pay rise. I started on minimum wage. They were happy with me. D'you know I gets along with everyone. It's a hard place to work and it is a stressful kitchen... nice to get an 'ol pat on the back every now and again.

11. The majority of participants in employment plan to change jobs with some planning to change careers.

Seven of the 10 participants still in employment at final interview wished to change jobs, with four indicating they may change career. Low wages and the impact of work on physical health were the main reasons for planning to change jobs. None of the participants are impulsive; all are considering and planning these moves.

I think I've driven too many kilometers in my lifetime. It's time to consider something entirely different. Ok, I'm gonna stick with it for the time being, but in my heart, I know I can't do this type work for too much longer. But I won't leave this job until I have something else planned properly. I'm going to continue working whatever happens. It's just that I can see that I'll probably have to branch into another line of work eventually.

12. Outstanding Challenges:

As the research ended, the main outstanding challenges for participants were:

- a. Securing safe, affordable, long-term, independent housing.
This was a struggle for the majority of participants during the research and by the end of the 25-month research period it remained an unresolved issue for 50% of participants.
- b. Managing and maintaining physical health.
By final interview, 43% of participants had experienced illness, injury or strain that moved them from the self-rated categories of 'good' or 'very good' health to 'ok' or 'poor' health. Some will need to manage these health conditions into the future. For the remainder, all of whom are employed in physically challenging work, maintaining physical health will be important in sustaining employment.
- c. Transitioning to alternative employment.
Seven out of 10 of those in employment at the end of the research wish to transition to new employment.

1.3 Outcomes

The following figures relate to the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained:

Employment:

- 71% (10 of the 14 participants) were still in employment at final interview.
 - The average rate of employment over the 25 months of the research period for this group was 90%
- 29% were unemployed at final interview.
 - The average rate of employment over the 25 months of the research period for this group was 23%.
- 57% changed jobs one or more times during the research.
- 43% moved into jobs of a higher skill level (mostly by changing jobs but also through promotion), progressing from unskilled to semi-skilled employment.
- 50% were promoted.
- 7 of the 10 participants still in employment at final interview wished to change jobs.

Housing:

- 57% of participants were in independent housing (private rented accommodation or social housing) at final interview compared to 21% at the time of starting work.
- 42% of participants were in emergency, temporary insecure or temporary supported accommodation at final interview (two-thirds of whom were in employment), compared to 78% at the time of starting work.

Health:

- 58% rated their physical health as 'good' / 'very good' at final interview compared to 100% at first interview.
- 36% commented on how work had a detrimental effect on their physical health.

- 65% rated their mental health as ‘good’ / ‘very good’ at final interview compared to 71% at first interview.
- Positive responses (agree / strongly agree) to statements indicating confidence and self-worth increased by almost 20% from first to final interview.

Problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling:

- 50% experienced a period of problematic alcoholic, drug or gambling use at some point during the research³.
- By final interview, 79% were managing⁴ their alcohol, drug or gambling use and 21% indicated problematic use, 1 of whom was in employment.

Finances

- 64% reported they were ‘managing well’ or ‘doing alright’ financially at final interview, but 35% reported they were struggling financially (they were ‘just about getting by’ or ‘finding it quite difficult’) - three of these five participants who were struggling financially were in employment.

1.4 Recommendations

- Government: Adequate supply of affordable, permanent housing. Housing insecurity will threaten employment.
- Government: Adoption of the Living Wage⁵. The 2019 Living Wage rate is €12.30 versus minimum wage of €10.10.
- Employment and Training Programme: Ongoing support or referral to appropriate organisations to support the wish, and in some cases the need for physical health reasons, to transition to alternative work.
- Employment and Training Programme: Development of a health guide with the aim of safeguarding physical wellbeing among people returning to work, especially those embarking on physically challenging work.

³ A period of problematic use is identified through participants accounts of the impact or consequences of alcohol, drugs or gambling in their lives. It is also reflected in their self-assessments at each interview, using a scale of 1 to 10 to gauge the negative impact of alcohol, drugs or gambling in their lives.

⁴ ‘Managing’ is derived from participants’ self-assessment using a 10-point scale to gauge the negative impact of alcohol, drugs or gambling in their lives, and in some cases is derived from a combination of self-assessment 10-point scales and participants’ reflections. 50% reported minimal, if any, use and negative impact of alcohol and no use of drugs and gambling. (They selected 0 or 1 on a 10-point scale where 1 indicated minimum, and 10 indicated maximum, negative impact). 29% experienced a period of problematic use at some point during the research but by final interview were managing their use. The varying impact of alcohol, drugs or gambling on these participants lives was derived from changing rating on their self-assessed 10-point scale and their personal reflections.

⁵ The Living Wage is set by the Living Wage Technical Group and is based on a single-adult household.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Cork Simon and the Employment and Training Team

Established in May 2010, Cork Simon's Employment and Training Programme facilitates and supports people in Cork who are currently or formerly homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to access education, training, work experience and employment opportunities. The programme is tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual and to support their personal choices, skills development, employment activation and reintegration into the wider community. A core aim of the Programme is to support service users in establishing sustainable routes out of homelessness through employment. Through this process, as service users progress to independent living many no longer need the support of the programme. The philosophy of the Employment and Training Programme and that of Cork Simon however is to support people for as long as they require and the door remains always open.

Many of the people Cork Simon support face multiple barriers to resuming or starting employment. Many have experienced deeply traumatic childhoods, institutionalisation, early school leaving and a distinct lack of opportunity and support throughout their lives. These factors, alongside issues such as poor health, problem alcohol, drug or gambling use; low confidence, isolation, perceptions of prejudice; out of date references and work experience, make moving into and sustaining employment a challenge.

Yet, in the nine and a half years between May 2010 and December 2019, the Employment and Training team supported at least 230 people to move into employment, in tandem with support from staff and volunteers across Cork Simon services. This collaborative approach is essential; there is often a road to travel in becoming 'ready' for work and the first steps of this journey often start months or even years before, through participation in other services and supports such as addiction counselling or in activities that help build confidence and social skills or even through a kind word or the offer of a listening ear. This cross-community support is equally important when it comes to supporting people to sustain employment, as Report 1, A Working Life: The Early Days demonstrated.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit Ireland in February 2020, bringing unimaginable change. Shortly after, the Government introduced Covid-19 restrictions to control the spread of the virus. Staff across Cork Simon had to respond quickly to adapt the delivery of all services. For the Employment and Training Programme, this meant the immediate suspension of all education and training classes due to social distancing requirements, the redeployment of some staff to frontline services and a swift change in support structures with phone replacing in-person support. Staff worked hard to support service users whose education or training had abruptly ended to adjust to the sudden lack of routine and interaction. They supported people who remained in employment delivering essential services during this challenging and uncertain time, and they supported those who lost employment temporarily or permanently to access pandemic unemployment payments and to adjust to their loss of occupation and structure.

Now, in September 2020, staff are reviewing and adapting training, education and employment supports to ensure their relevance to the current and future employment market. Some training is recommencing in external, socially distanced settings. This research highlights the importance of the Employment and Training service resuming for the people it supports. Now more than ever people need occupation – whether through education or employment, they need connections – whether with colleagues or classmates, and they need hope. Work – and working towards work – offers hope for the future, a sense of control over one's future, brings social and psychological benefits and can be a catalyst for life change.

2.2 Participants' backgrounds

All research participants had experienced, or were at risk of, homelessness at the time they started work. 89% had experienced homelessness in the previous two years. Among them, about half had been homeless for less than a year and about half for more than a year. One man had been homeless for 12 years.

Over three-quarters of participants started work without the security of a stable, safe base; over half were staying in emergency accommodation while others were staying in temporary insecure accommodation or private rented accommodation that was detrimental to their well-being.

The majority of participants were men (89%), non-Irish nationals (72%) and aged between 27 and 44 years (50%) at the time they started work.

Relationship breakdown (39%) was the most common reason for participants losing their last accommodation.

Almost one in four were in early recovery⁶ as they moved into work. This could make them vulnerable but also indicates their strengths and the journey they had travelled in the months prior to starting work.

All but one of the participants had worked before, with two-thirds working in the 12 months prior to returning to work. The most common area of past work experience was construction where one in five had worked. The remaining third were long-term unemployed⁷ as they returned to work - all but one participant from this cohort had also experienced long-term homelessness⁸.

Many participants are skilled workers – 56% of participants most recent work experience was skilled or semi-skilled. In addition, the majority (83%) had taken part in training⁹ facilitated by the Employment and Training team. Half of participants had also attended 'Jobs Club'¹⁰ and one third had participated in 'Step to Work'¹¹, facilitated by the Employment and Training Team, in preparation for work. Two-thirds were engaged in an Employment and Training organised mentoring programme on commencement of work¹².

⁶ Early recovery includes the first 90 days of sobriety and can last up to the first year or so of recovery. <https://www.addiction.com/in-recovery/living-sober/early-recovery/>

⁷ Long-term unemployment is defined by Government as unemployment for 12 months or more. Long-term unemployment is widely known to negatively impact skills and confidence and to make re-integration to the workplace more challenging.

⁸ Long-term homelessness is defined by Government as continuous or episodic stays of 6 months or more over the previous 12 months in emergency accommodation.

⁹ A wide variety of accredited and unaccredited education and training courses, including work related training courses are coordinated and facilitated by the Employment and Training Team. A total of 311 short or unaccredited training courses and 98 accredited courses were availed of by service users in 2017 (the year participants moved into work). The most popular courses in 2017 were Manual Handling, Food Safety & HACCP and SafePass. (Cork Simon Community. 2017. *Employment & Training Project Operation Report*).

¹⁰ The Employment and Training Project runs a weekly 'Jobs Club' where attendees are offered practical supports such as assistance conducting job searches, completing application forms, C.V. writing and interview practice.

¹¹ Step to Work was a work experience programme run by Cork Simon's Employment and Training Team for service users on the brink of job readiness. Participants developed skills, gained confidence, and prepared themselves psychologically for a return to work through on-the-job experience. The programme had to be discontinued in 2019 with the introduction of EU Legislation which prohibited unpaid work experiences.

¹² An Employment Mentoring Programme was launched in 2016 to provide employees with access to a mentor who delivers ongoing, one-to-one support relating to the person's new role, future career, and any personal issues arising. This programme has no statutory funding. In 2017, it was funded by BNY Mellon Bank through United World Way.

Almost one in four participants had debts as they started work and half of participants had family (partner and/or child/ren) to support.

2.3 Methodology

Recruiting and maintaining contact with participants

- The recruitment aim of the research was to conduct initial interviews with as many Employment and Training service users who started work during the first six months of 2017 as possible.
- 18 out of 21 service users who started work during the first six months of 2017 remained in contact with the Employment and Training Team. Fiona Hagensen, Employment and Training Co-Ordinator invited these 18 people to participate in the research and all agreed.
- Interviews were conducted at three time points throughout the research: in 2017 (Phase 1), 2018 (Phase 2) and 2019 (Phase 3).
- The full interview phase, from first to last interview, was 25 months.
- Initial interviews, during Phase 1, were conducted with 18 participants.
- Contact was maintained with 14 of these 18 participants through follow-up interviews at Phases 2 and 3:
 - 10 participants were interviewed during Phase 2.
 - 11 participants were interviewed during Phase 3 (seven of whom had last interviewed at Phase 2; four of whom had last interviewed at Phase 1) and updates on the housing and employment situations of an additional two participants were provided by the Employment and Training team at Phase 3.
- A total of 39 interviews were conducted.
- Contact was maintained with 14 participants for between 10 and 24 months. The average contact time (span between a participant’s first and last interview) was 19.5 months.

Table 2-1 Interview phases

Phase 1	28.02.2017 – 07.09.2017	6 months	18 interviews
Phase 2	02.05.2018 – 18.07.2018	2.5 months	10 interviews
Phase 3	29.01.2019 – 17.04.2019	3 months	11 interviews and 2 updates

Figure 2-1 Number of interviews and number of participants

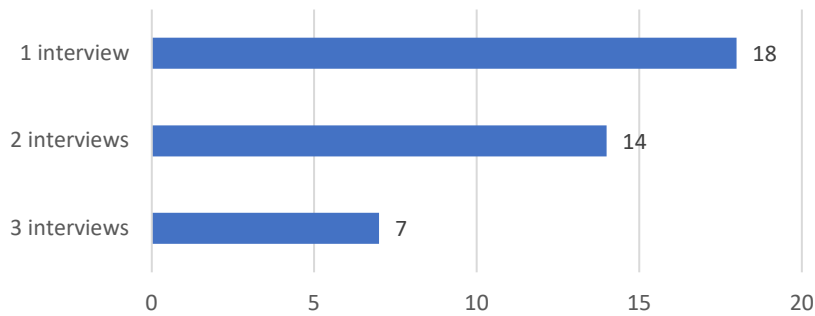


Figure 2-2 Length of time contact was maintained with participants.



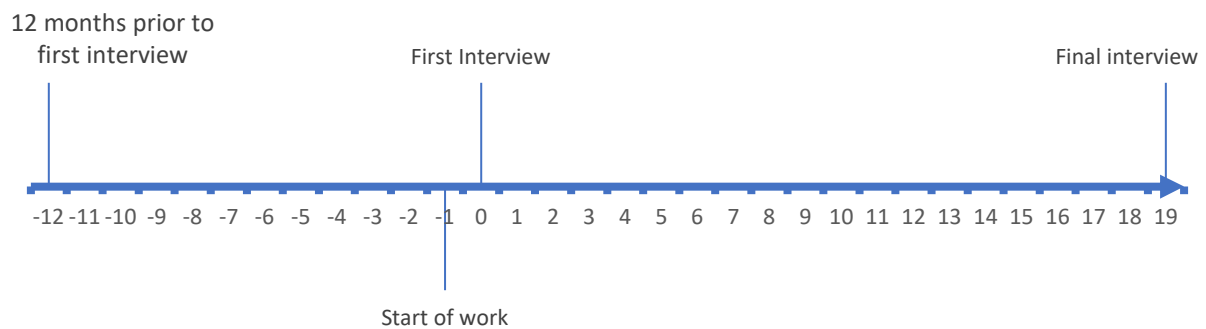
Interviews

- Interviews were conducted through semi-structured surveys, which included qualitative and quantitative questions.
- Most interviews took place at the Employment and Training Team's offices. Some interviews took place at other Cork Simon locations and some at cafes.
- Informed written consent to take part in the research was obtained from each participant at the start of each interview.
- Participants were assured anonymity unless they said something that posed a risk to themselves or others and this was explained when consent was sought. For this reason, participants' names and some personal details have been changed in this report.
- If participants agreed, interviews were recorded and transcribed. Notes were also taken by interviewers.
- Participants received a €10 voucher for each interview participated in, in recognition of their time and input.
- All participants names have been changed to protect identities.

Analysis

- Qualitative data was analysed using SPSS and quantitative data was coded and analysed using NVivo.
- This report focuses on the experiences of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained. It draws primarily on the 21 follow up interview from Phase 2 and Phase 3 with these 14 participants. It also occasionally compares data relating to the 14 participants from their initial interviews at Phase 1 with data from Phases 2 and 3. In all, analysis is drawn from 35 interviews.
- Comparisons are made between a number of time points in this report:
 - 12 months prior to first interview.
 - The time of starting work – mean average of 5 weeks before first interview.
 - The time of first interview - mean average of 5 weeks after starting work.
 - The time of final interview - mean average of 19.5 months after first interview / mean average of 21 months after starting work.

Figure 2-3 Time point averages

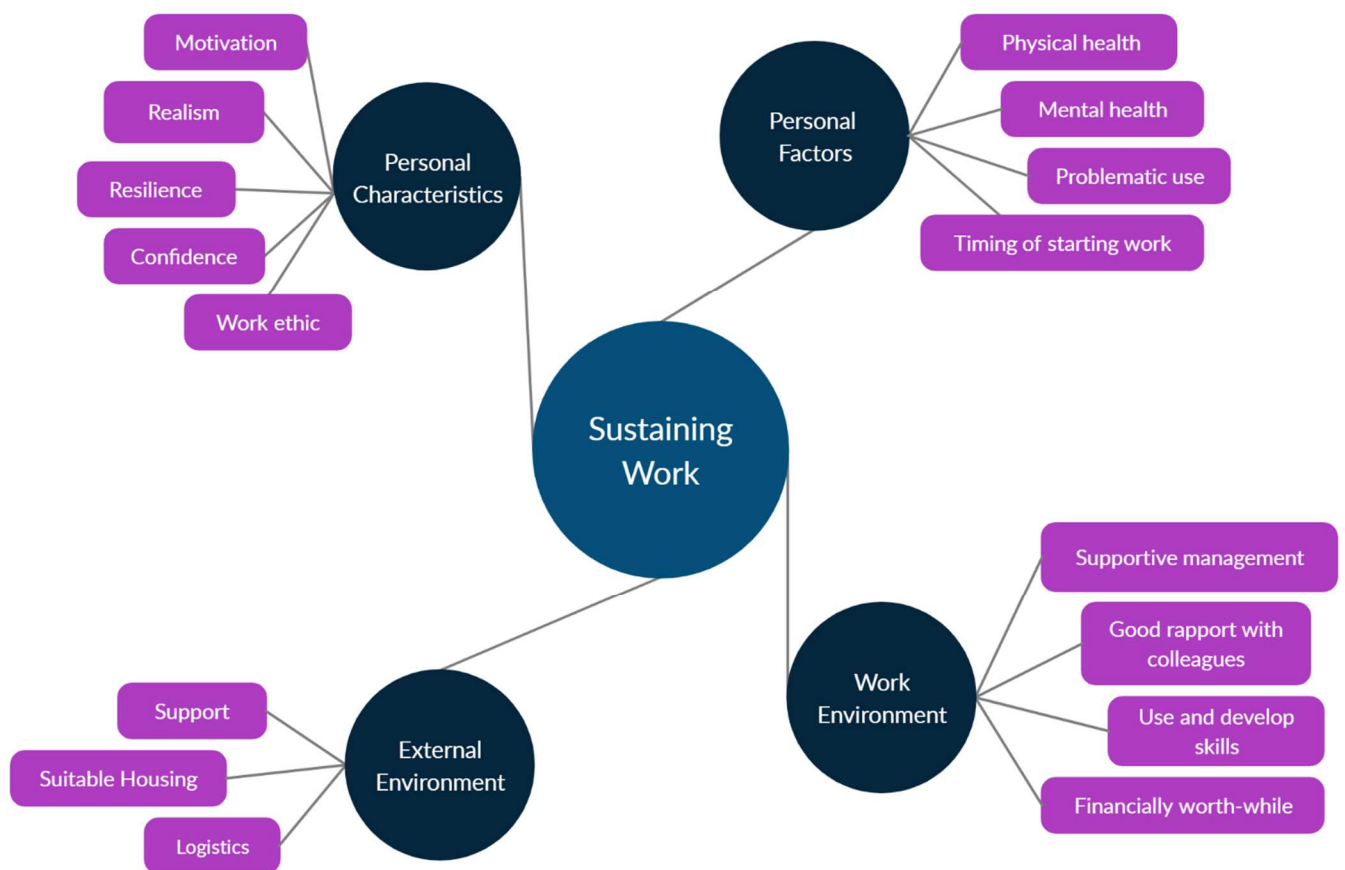


3 SUSTAINING WORK

The research finds the following factors important to the sustaining of employment among participants. These factors are inter-related; a problem or an upturn in one area can influence another area. There is a particular link between mental health, problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling, housing insecurity, and resilience.

This section draws on data from first interviews and follow up interviews.

Figure 3-1 Sustaining work - the factors



3.1 Personal Characteristics

- **Motivation**

Participants held strong and clear motivations for working, as detailed in Report 1¹³. These motivations helped them stay the course when challenges arose.

Adam's motivation for persevering was clear: *My family. Only my family. If I haven't a job, we haven't money for rent, for school, for food.*

A desire to hold on to what had been achieved and a reluctance to return to the past emerged as a new motivator as the research continued, as described here by Steve: *Don't want to go backwards: I don't want to go back into my old ways. I'm not going back down that road again.*

- **Realism**

Many participants adopt a 'step by step' approach to improving their situations showing patience, determination and commitment to their goals and motivations.

The majority of participants took physically challenging, low skilled and low paid work when returning to work. By the end of the research, six of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained (or 43%) had progressed from initial jobs to 'better jobs'¹⁴. By final interview many wished to transition again to more suitable or better paid employment, but none are impulsive; all are considering their next moves. Adam for example, considered it important that he change not only to a better paid job, but to a permanent position.

Steve expresses this 'step by step' approach to life in general: *Just day by day, one step at a time and I'll get there eventually. Not one big jump and I'll be there, I know that. Next thing now is a house. Eventually... I know it mightn't come today, I know it mightn't come tomorrow, but eventually. Keep working hard. Put your mind to anything and you'll get it like. But everyday trying to take steps towards it. Just keep the head steady and keep looking forward instead of backwards.*

- **Resilience**

Many participants faced enormous stresses as they moved into work, particularly the need to stay in emergency accommodation. But many endured and adapted, progressed and now thrive.

Not all participants' progress was linear; some experienced setbacks such as a return to problematic alcohol, drug or gambling use, or the loss of accommodation, but many recovered or adapted.

At final interview, Cedric was holding down work while staying in emergency accommodation. He was back where he had been at the start of the research. In between he had secured and maintained private rented accommodation for 12 months but suffered a setback when injury led to unemployment, a return to homelessness and a return to addiction. Back in emergency accommodation and trying to hold down work was proving exhausting for Cedric at final interview,

¹³ An overarching motivation for working among participants was to restore or to build a normal life. Among the individual motivating factors that could lead to this normal life, gaining housing and being able to provide for family were most commonly referred to by participants. In a more general sense, participants wanted to contribute to and feel a part of society, be independent and use their time in a meaningful way.

¹⁴ These jobs were defined as better in terms of working conditions and work satisfaction, as reported by participants.

but he was positive, and he had a plan. For Cedric, motivation and resilience went hand-in-hand: *What can I say, it's difficult. But people survive at war, I will survive here. It's not the worst thing that could happen. But I have a motivation - I want back to normal life and that's it. This is the one thing telling me not to give up.*

Resilience however can be finite and in recounting his accommodation struggles, David expressed a sense of his resilience being worn down when he once again lost accommodation: *Next time, after two months and again it's like puff. Too much, like, you know, why me again? Small bit of depression.*

- **Confidence**

Participants indicated good confidence at the start of the research¹⁵ when embarking on employment and by final interview, confidence rating had increased by a further 20%. As the research progressed, some participants began to self-identify as confident: they noted personal strengths and identified the value they were bringing to their team or place of work.

- **Strong work ethic**

Many participants communicate and demonstrate a strong work ethic, defined as “a belief in work as a moral good : a set of values centred on the importance of doing work and reflected especially in a desire or determination to work hard.”¹⁶

Over the course of the research, participants often spoke about the meaning of work in terms of personal responsibility; self-sufficiency, contributing to society, providing for family and acting as a positive role model to their children.

Many participants also demonstrated a determination to work, in spite of significant barriers to starting and maintaining work, and a determination to be productive.

Frustration set in for Leon when work lessened: *I could be there feeling comfortable, but I need to be useful.*

Andy described the connection between his values and his hard work: *I put every effort and every strength of me into work and people see that. They don't want people that will just be walking around, lazing around, waiting to get their pay cheque at the end of the week. I don't believe in that.*

3.2 Personal Factors

- **Physical health**

Poor physical health was a significant obstacle to some participants ability to sustain work.

By final interview, two participants were unable to work due to injury or illness, while a third participant had returned to work, tentatively, after 11 months in receipt of Illness Benefit following

¹⁵ 76% of the original 18 participants, or 70% of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, agreed or strongly agreed with statements indicating confidence and self-worth.

¹⁶ "work ethic." *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2020. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/work%20ethic>

an injury. Another three participants' physical health was posing a challenge to their ability to continue in their current jobs.

Good physical health is crucial for sustaining work, especially when employed in physically challenging work, as were the majority of participants.

- **Mental health**

Many participants referred to the mental health benefits of work, particularly in terms of camaraderie and good relations with colleagues, as a positive that motivated them to keep working.

A small minority of participants indicated mental health challenges had negatively impacted their ability to sustain work. In each case, these mental health challenges manifested to a greater or lesser extent in problematic use of alcohol or drugs, which impacted their ability to work.

Housing difficulties, deteriorations in mental health and problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling were interconnected.

- **Problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling**

In the early days of work, as documented in Report 1, The Early Days, problematic use among other factors contributed to one participant losing work. As the research continued, problematic use contributed directly and partially to two more participants losing or leaving work.

A variety of life factors could exacerbate or ameliorate problematic use. Stays in emergency accommodation and rough sleeping were particularly common factors contributing to problematic use.

While problematic use resulted in a minority of participant losing or leaving work, 50% of participants found that working significantly helped them to manage their use.

3.3 Work Environment

- **Financially worthwhile**

Participants' financial and life expectations are modest, and participants are clear about the many and varied benefits that working brings to their lives. However, work must make financial sense. When work proved to not be financially worthwhile or when financial disruption was experienced (as was experienced by many in the early days of work and described in Report 1, The Early Days), it could pose a serious challenge to people's perseverance.

As the research continued, two participants resigned when their jobs proved to not be financially worthwhile; one participant lost his motivation for working when his company could no longer afford over-time which was propping up his low wage while the second participant found her wage was not enough to support traveling to and from work.

A further two participants highlighted how extra responsibility without suitably matched extra income, can de-motivate. Both were promoted and both described how their small pay rises did not

match the extra responsibility that came with promotion, causing one to step back to his original position and prompting the other to search for new work.

- **Positive work environment including:**
 - **Supportive management**
 - **Good rapport with colleagues**
 - **Opportunities to use and develop skills**

Participants appreciate and value positive work environments, including constructive relationships with managers, good rapport with colleagues and opportunities to use and develop skills. Such environments add to participants enjoyment of, and commitment to, work.

James, for example, appreciated the support he received from colleagues and management when out of work on sick leave and was looking forward to his return to work: [Me getting this illness has proven the support I do get from my colleagues as well as the boss... I will be happy going in back there next week.](#)

Steve also appreciated his work environment and the positive feedback he received from his manager, saying: [I feel like I'm wanted. I feel myself like I want to go in there.](#)

Two participants described how positive work environments were of higher value than financial gain. Jakub and Andy work in the construction industry and during the course of the research both were offered better paid work but because of the good relations they had built with colleagues and the opportunities for learning and development that their work offered, both chose to remain with their employers.

3.4 External Environment

- **Access to support**

The Employment and Training team continued to support the majority of participants over the course of the research in a variety of ways, from negotiating with managers during the early days of work, to support in times of personal stress, to sourcing training, to supporting participants work and personal development, to assistance in securing new employment. This support had clear practical benefits and provided important moral support. There is an understanding and a sense of security among participants that while their lives progress, 'back up' is still available from the Employment and Training Team, should it be needed.

[It's great, because I do know if I ever have a serious, serious issue I can always talk to \[Employment and Training staff\].](#)

- **Suitable housing**

Homelessness and housing insecurity caused considerable stress and upheaval and challenged many participants' ability to work.

About one third of participants experienced housing difficulties as the research continued, which directly or indirectly challenged their ability to work¹⁷. These ranged from homelessness (staying in emergency accommodation or rough sleeping) to a housing crisis (an urgent need to find alternative

¹⁷ This figure is drawn from follow-up interviews and excludes the difficulty of staying in emergency accommodation as experienced by many in the initial weeks of work, as outlined in Report 1. 'The Early Days'.

accommodation) to the impact of the effects of housing insecurity (including increased problematic alcohol or drug use and deteriorating mental and physical health).

The challenge of working while staying in emergency accommodation re-occurred for Cedric towards the end of the research; he found himself once again trying to sustain work on minimal sleep and adopting a coping strategy whereby he would take ad hoc day's off in order to sleep and recover in an attempt to keep going.

Steve began working while staying in a tent and once he had some income, stayed in hostels. The stress and upheaval and effort of concealing his situation from his employer meant his employment nearly ended before it properly began.

Housing insecurity resulted in an employment as well as a housing crisis for Gabriel when he received a notice of termination from his landlord and had to take unplanned leave from work, at a busy time, so as to find alternative accommodation.

- **Logistics**

Logistics proved to be a significant challenge during participants early days in work, as described in Report 1. Many had to manage a long, physical commute before and after a day of physically challenging work. This situation proved challenging for many and unsustainable for one participant who was otherwise doing very well in his job.

Thankfully, this issue improved for the majority, to their relief, as they arranged lifts or bought transport or were given the use of company transport – all of which made working more sustainable.

By final interview, one participant, as a result of housing insecurity, was still enduring a physical commute coupled with physically challenging work. Both activities combined were taking their toll on his body and draining him; he was considering alternative employment.

The amount of walking I have to do just to get to work; the amount of pain I have to absorb while I'm working. That's draining me. There must be an easier way of doing things.

4 EMPLOYMENT

KEY DATA

- At final interview, 71% of those with whom contact was maintained (10 out of 14 participants) were still in employment. A 90% employment rate was recorded among this group of 10 participants.
- Over half (n.8) were employed in more than one job during the course of the research.
- 31 jobs were recorded over the course of the research for the 14 participants.
- The main reason for employment ending was the ending of a temporary contract.
- Industries that participants were employed in diversified as the research continued.
- Close to half of participants (n.6) improved the skill level of their work, progressing from unskilled to semi-skilled work.
- The challenges of logistics and new routines, which were present for many as they started work, become much easier for the majority as work continued.
- The challenge of coping with physically demanding work remained and the challenge of coping with pressure at work increased as employment progressed.
- There is evidence that many participants are hard-working, responsible, socially integrated employees:
 - 50% received a promotion;
 - many received praise and positive feedback;
 - employees fit in well; good relations with colleagues was most commonly identified by participants as the 'best part' of work.
- Participants felt valued, trusted and wanted in response to praise and positive feedback and feelings of pride, recognition and satisfaction accompanied promotion.
- Promotion could bring extra stress and financial rewards were not always considered worth the extra responsibility that promotion carried.
- 4 out of 10 participants in employment at final interview indicate high levels of work satisfaction – they thoroughly enjoy and appreciate their work and their lives have changed markedly through work. These participants share a number of factors which lead to their high level of work satisfaction:
 - They get on well with, and some enjoy good friendships with their colleagues;
 - They receive positive feedback from, and are on good terms with, their managers;
 - They are using and developing their skills;
 - They enjoy the routine of work.
- 7 out of 10 participants in employment at final interview wish to change jobs (including participants who indicate high satisfaction with their current work). The most common reasons for wishing to change jobs are to increase income and to ameliorate the impact of their current work on their physical health.

4.1 Overview - outcomes, jobs, industry

Employment outcome

At the time of final interview - an average of 19 months after first interview - 10 of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, or 71%, were still in employment; 4 participants, or 29%, were no longer working.

i. Employed

Among the 10 participants still in employment at final interview, three had maintained continuous employment in their original jobs and seven were employed in new jobs.

Some moved straight from one job to another and some experienced breaks in employment ranging from a few days to 11 months in one participant's case. None became long-term unemployed¹⁸ between jobs. An employment rate of 90% was recorded for this group of 10 people still in employment at final interview, indicating the low level of breaks in employment among the group.

ii. Unemployed

Among the four participants no longer working at final interview, three had been employed in a single job for two months each and were long-term unemployed by final interview. The fourth participant had been employed in two jobs for a combined total of 15 months and was short-term unemployed by the end of the research.

Table 4-1 Employment overview among 14 participants during the research period.

Category	Average number of jobs	Average length of time in employment	Employment Rate
14 participants with whom contact was maintained	2.2	17 months	72%
10 participants in employment at final interview	2.6	21 months	90%
4 participants unemployed at final interview	1.2	5 months	23%

Jobs

31 jobs were recorded for the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained over the 25 months of the research – an average of 2.2 jobs per participant.

57% of participants (n.8) were employed in two or more jobs.

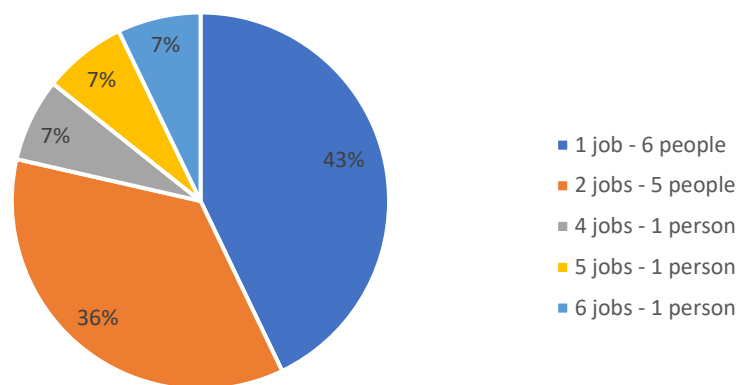
As can be seen from the pie chart below the majority of participants held one to two jobs and a minority held four, five and six jobs.

Participants in their fifth and sixth jobs were employed in the construction industry where short-term contracts and day-to-day work are common. These two participants experienced minimal breaks between jobs and at final interview both were in stable employment. However, both spoke about the difficulty of short-term contracts in terms of working a week-in-arrears and managing on emergency tax.

Jakub: I was on emergency tax most of the time until I started with [name of company] because I was employed with a few companies so... I was jumping up and down from one to the other; smaller wages.

Andy: He texts me every week, like... July is only around the corner... hold out until July and we'll get you back in. How can I leave one company and go on to another and then having to do the week in hand again? It's frustrating. Even though I've got money, it's just having to do that week in hand.

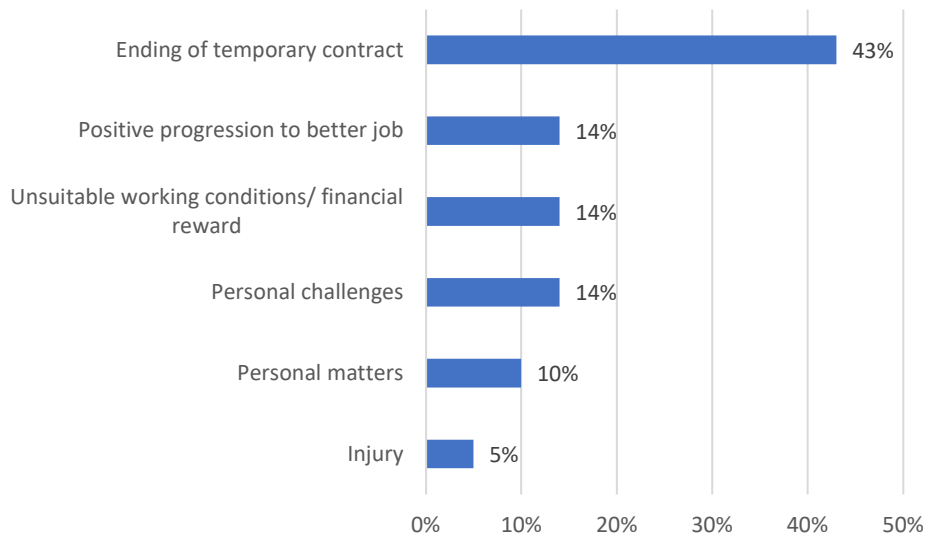
Figure 4-1 Number of jobs among 14 participants



Jobs ending

Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, 21 jobs are recorded as ending during the course of the research (from first to final interview). The main reason was the ending of a temporary contract.

Figure 4-2 Reasons for ending of jobs among 14 participants.



*Personal challenges related to three participants. Problem alcohol or drug use, poor coping skills or poor mental health, often alongside other factors, contributed to the ending of employment. Two of the three individuals went on to secure stable employment, which they sustained.

*Personal matters related to two participants; one participant experienced a clash in the timing of starting work and moving to independent housing and decided, as his unemployment was short-term and not without its problems, that housing was his priority; the other participant stopped his temporary work to take parental leave following the birth of his baby. Both went on to secure stable employment, which they sustained.

Sourcing subsequent employment

Among the eight participants who secured subsequent employment, jobs were sourced with support from the Employment and Training Team and sourced independently by participants in about equal measure. Where sourced independently by participants, recruitment agencies were sometimes used.

Following the ending of his first job, a short-term contract, Andy's determination to secure employment and exit emergency accommodation remained:

I got sick to the teeth of being inside the Simon so then I went out and I joined up with every agency in Cork city. [Name of recruitment agency] was the first to get back to me so I just stayed with them.

Jakub held six, mostly short-term, construction related jobs during the course of the research. He secured his sixth job (a permanent position) following a successful work trial, which he was called for many months after submitting his CV.

I was sending my CV everywhere. He rang me and I checked my emails – it was actually eight months before (that) I send my CV. He rang me after eight months! He found my CV somewhere. I have good

resume; I can do lots of things. He said he take me for a trial but after about two weeks he ask me about how much I want.

Steve started a new job while having to stay in a tent. He also started with a work trial which progressed to full time work.

I was walking around town everyday with CVs and when they rang me, I started laughing... I said there's no way they're gonna see me. And when I went in, I didn't even have a shower, I didn't have nothing. I was going in in rags. And this woman said, 'show me what you can do? I'll give you a day's trial'. She gave me a day's trial and she said there's a few hours there at the weekend if you want them. And then I just went from there.

Industry

The industries that participants are employed in diversifies as the research continues. Participants' first jobs were predominantly in the services industry, followed by the construction industry. Participants' jobs at final interview were more evenly distributed across services, construction, food and hospitality and wholesale industries.

Figure 4-3 Industries at start of research among 18 participants.

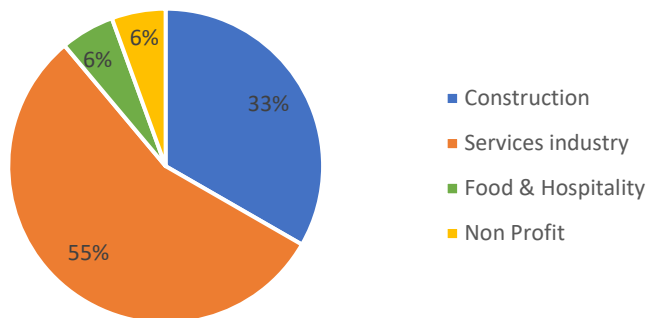
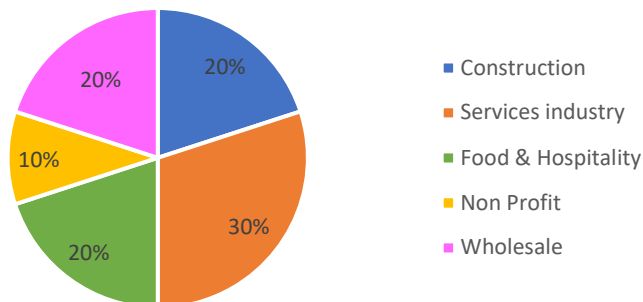


Figure 4-4 Industry at end of research among 10 participants still in employment.



4.2 Adapting

Many participants speak of increasing ease and familiarity with their work. Many say they have developed routines, which they enjoy. The logistics of getting to and from work, a significant hurdle for many at the start of the research, become easier for almost all.

Gabriel: I got more used to it. Now it's more like a routine. Once you get the place figured out, it's easier, you know? It [stress associated with the job] would have been eight early on but it's more like a five now, because I know it so well.

Logistics

Logistics was identified in the first report, The Early Days, as a challenge for participants in their early days of work. None had their own transport. Many had physically demanding commutes, such as walks or cycles of 45 to 60 minutes before starting a day of physical work, followed by a physically demanding return commute. In the early days, this was a source of significant strain.

Eight of the 10 participants still in employment at final interview referred to transport and how it had improved. By final interview, five participants had their own transport (four had bought a car or scooter and one had the use of a company van) and three participants had arranged lifts with colleagues.

One participant bought a car and adopted an entrepreneurial approach by charging colleagues a small fee for lifts to work. This income covered his petrol costs.

Just one participant was still experiencing a difficult commute at final interview.

Routine

While adapting to new routines was a challenge for some in the early days, by final interview many participants enjoy and appreciate their routines.

Andy talked about the benefit of maintaining a routine, even on days off:

I don't even like taking days off work. I don't like not having that morning routine, where I get up at a certain time, have a cup of coffee, get dressed and head out the door. When I'm off for the day it's like I can sleep in, but it's that sleep pattern that I get into that'd make me lazy for the following day and it would make me wanna sit on myself for the day.

When out of work due on sick leave, James missed the routine that came with working, indicating its benefit to his mental health

I feel very strange. I suppose I was after getting into a very nice routine. I have myself in a lovely routine actually. I will be happy going in back there next week. I miss my routine. I kinda feel like a fish out a water at the moment. I want to get back.

4.3 Progress - promotion, praise, skills & training

There is much evidence of employees engaging in good quality work and adding value to their workplaces. This is evident through promotions, participants being 'head hunted', positive customer feedback, praise and appreciation from employers. In turn, employees feel valued, trusted and integral to their workplaces. It is also clear from the numbers who have engaged in training and the numbers promoted, that participants value learning and progress.

Promotion

50% of participants with whom contact was maintained (n.7) received a promotion.

Five participants received a formal promotion during the course of the research and two received an informal promotion – they were given extra responsibilities and rewards.

Promotions were received in a variety of industries. Formal promotions were from the roles of General Operatives to the roles of Team Leaders, Store Manager and Block Layer and from the role of Crew Member to Customer Care Supervisor. Informal promotions did not bring a change of title.

Feelings of pride, of recognition, satisfaction and happiness were referred to by those promoted.

Promotion could also however bring extra stress and financial rewards were not always considered to be worth the extra responsibility that promotion carried.

Jakub described his progress and informal promotion in a construction job: *After five months there, because I have loads of experience, I have to order materials and telling people that come to the job what to do. I have more responsibilities. Money didn't change but after five months, I get the company van and he pays for diesel, so it's probably like 70 euros extra a week - all the insurance and stuff. So it's been really good - I'm happy out.*

Steve's work in a busy kitchen began with basic duties like making salads and brushing the floor. He described an informal promotion, based on his work ability and interpersonal skills, whereby his duties and his pay increased.

Just like, now, I can order the meat. I knows what has to be thrown out, what has to be taken out, what has to be used today. Like when we get a new trainee, they makes me train them in. It's good to have that work as well and I got a pay rise. I started on minimum wage. They were happy with me. D'you know I gets along with everyone. It's a hard place to work and it is a stressful kitchen... nice to get an 'ol pat on the back every now and again.

Adam received a formal promotion but felt the financial reward did not reflect his extra responsibilities, with the result being he will look for alternative work:

I am Team Leader almost one year and my manager promoted me, maybe because of my good work. For now it's ok, but payment is small. I have only 50 cent more from General Operative - it's small - and I think for this position, Team Leader, it is not enough. I try and look for new job. I have many pressures in this position and many responsibility, but for 50 cent, it's too small.

Gabriel was happy and proud in receiving his formal promotion but also talked about the increased pressure that came with it. He considers whether he may be in a period of transition and will adapt or whether this pressure is intrinsic to his new role.

More responsibilities. It's not just physical. Now I need to go home and check emails and well, it's not just here that I'm working; when I'm going home and at home I also have to, you know, pay attention to what's going on here. Maybe it's me just adjusting to new challenges, to new responsibilities. Maybe it's like this overall, once you get to a different position other than just the General Operative. I'd say that's it. I try to deal with it. I felt recognition when I got this promotion and well, I was happy about it. I feel like I have moved up in life. I proved myself.

Head-hunted / Skills sought

Two participants working in construction were 'head-hunted' at various times, indicating the quality of their work. Neither, however, took up the offers. Andy remained with his employer because he was learning a new skill. Jakub, while he could have commanded a higher wage with competitors, remained loyal to his employer because he appreciated the good relations and the positive work environment at his place of work.

I had maybe five job offers with better money and stuff you know, because things are good now. You meet someone on the side sometimes. I know I'd easy get 100 euros more a week, but this company is like a family, everyone trust each other. I never saw anyone arguing with each other. It's like we talk - if something is wrong, we just talk. And then you know, there's two guys and we're like best friends. It's the way it's supposed to be like.

Praise

A number of participants received positive feedback, praise and recognition for their work from management. Participants spoke of how they appreciated such feedback and felt valued, trusted and wanted.

James has received a number of bonus' along with praise for his skilled work and constructive attitude:

Well, they value me as a great driver. They actually reckon I'm one of the top drivers there. So, they don't want to lose me. Basically, 'we're very happy with you or oh, look, you had a hard week there last week, really sorry about that, this happens in the job, you got through it and you didn't complain too much'. They don't want to lose you - so it's an incentive to stay with them. Now they won't do that for everyone, but if they value you, they will. It made me feel good - appreciated. And to be honest, I will be happy going in back there next week.

Julia's manager reported positive feedback from a customer:

I have nice feedback from the customers. They wrote to the management already that I'm so nice and helpful. So, everybody's happy.

Jakub's manager also reported positive feedback from a customer. Following this feedback, Jakub's method of working was adopted by the company:

He came to me and he said, 'look, I have to tell you something'. It was strange because he never does it. He said to me that he met the customer - the customer said the work is exceptional. So since then he got rid of all the sub-contractors so I do that all the time. And now, you know, it's great!

Steve has received praise and acknowledgement from his managers and an increase in his duties. He explains how he feels in response:

I'm trusted. I feel like I'm progressing. I'm not like one of these people that's just there for the sake of being there. I feel like I'm wanted.

Skill Level

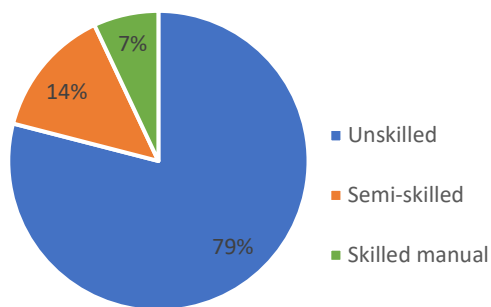
It was found in Report 1, The Early Days, that many participants accepted work of a lower skill level than they were capable of, in order to return to work¹⁹.

As the research progressed, six of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained (or 43%) moved into jobs of a higher skill level, progressing from unskilled to semi-skilled employment.

One participant's progression came through promotion while the remaining five participants moved to new jobs.

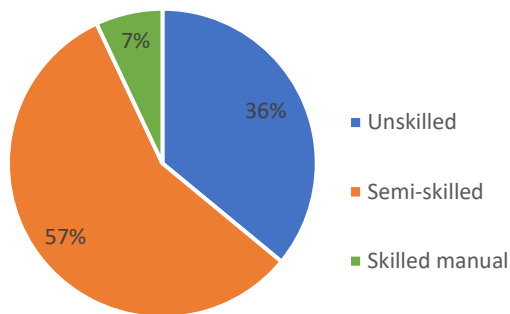
A combination of prior experience, relevant training and the gaining of appropriate certification supported their moves.

Figure 4-5 Skill level of 14 participants' jobs at the time of first interview.



¹⁹ Commencing work at the start of this research, 43% of the original 18 participants were employed in jobs requiring a lower skills level than their last employment. Two thirds of these 18 participants were short-term unemployed at the start of the research, indicating their skills at that time were still relevant.

Figure 4-6 Skill level of 14 participants' job at the time of final interview.



Training

Over 50% of participants with whom contact was maintained (n.8) engaged in training during the course of the research. Three participants gained training through their work and five pursued training external to work. Most external training was organised by the Employment and Training Team.

Many participants value learning; despite offers of other work, Andy stays in his current job because he values the new skill he is learning there; Gabriel considers learning “important” and appreciates how much he has learned through his Store Manager training; Frank sees education as a means to securing a better job.

Training organised by an employer:

1. In-house Customer Care Supervisor training
2. In-house Store Manager training
3. External Scaffolding Ticket Level 1

Training organised by the Employment and Training Team:

4. Forklift licence
5. Driver CPC (Certificate of Professional Competence) outstanding modules
6. MEWP (Mobile Elevated Work Platform) training
7. English language course

Training organised by an individual

8. Online modular data analysis course

4.4 Work satisfaction

A note on happiness

50% of participants who were in employment at final interview (n.5) use the word “happy” in relation to how they feel about their work or about the difference working makes to their lives.

Level of job satisfaction - high

Among the 10 participants still in employment at final interview, four stand out for their high level of work satisfaction in their current jobs. All had progressed to new jobs since the start of the research. They were in these jobs between one and 19 months at the time of final interview. Industries included food and hospitality, construction, and services. While the jobs are not without their drawbacks, the participants share a number of factors which lead to their high level of work satisfaction:

1. They get on well with, and some enjoy good friendships with, their colleagues.
2. They receive positive feedback from, and are on good terms with, their managers.
3. They are using and developing their skills
4. They enjoy the routine of work.

Yet still, two of these four participants wish to transition out of their current work for health reasons. But both are resolute that they will continue working. More on transitions below.

Steve – If you get up and do what you want to do every day, no reason not to be happy.

Andy - I just love working, I really do.

Jakub - Having a job makes a massive difference, especially the job that I have, that I enjoy. I like the people. I like everything about it. I can't imagine myself in a different job. I go to work and obviously there is things that I don't like to do but like, I'm happy out - I'm really happy at work.

James - It's very challenging and it's very interesting. I've done lots of different driving jobs over the years but nothing at all like this.

Level of job satisfaction - medium

Three participants are somewhat satisfied with their work. They are not as enthused as the above group and they describe more issues with their work, but they are not as eager to change jobs as the group (below) that feels they do not gain personal satisfaction from their work.

Level of job satisfaction - low

The remaining three participants do not gain personal satisfaction from their work. For most, income is the main benefit. All are in the same job since the start of the research. All wish to change jobs but

none are impulsive; all plan to remain in their current employment until they can secure a better job.

Frank highlights the lack of personal satisfaction from his physically challenging, repetitive work: Work is work. It's not something ideal. It's not something that make me feel good. You know, it's something [to] pay the bills. It's a job to survive, you know. I'm happy because I work, but satisfaction personally, no.

When Leon started working, he was initially delighted – he found his colleagues helpful and pleasant and he noted psychological benefits to starting work, particularly new-found feelings of hope and pride. After some time, he commented on how the work was becoming more routine and lacking challenge, but he was able to put a positive slant on this, seeing it as a sign that he was becoming used to work again. When he changed his work hours so as to increase access to his children, he found there was less required of him during his new shift, which led to more dissatisfaction. He wanted to be productive. By final interview it was causing him some distress and he was planning to speak to his manager about alternative work. For Leon, work satisfaction is connected to feeling useful or productive.

During his second interview, Leon commented: The work is simple enough that there is no challenge for me. Good indicator that I am changing, and I am stronger.

At his third and final interview Leon was feeling frustrated: I am useless. This is not acceptable to me. There is not enough to do for all of us. I could be there feeling comfortable, but I need to be useful. I think I probably should change my job. I'm going to ask for other duties – anything to feel more useful.

4.5 Transition

Any job – better job – more suitable job

Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, over half (n.8) changed jobs during the course of the research.

By the end of the research, 43% (n.6) had moved from 'any job' (generally²⁰ their initial job) to a 'better job'. These jobs were categorised as better in terms of working conditions and work satisfaction, as described by participants.

By the end of the research, three of these six participants wished to change jobs again, this time to work more suited to their particular health concerns.

²⁰ In the case of five participants, their initial job came under the description 'any job'. One participant's employment path followed a more unusual route. He began with what he considered to be a great job, but unfortunately lost this job. He subsequently held a number of jobs in the category of 'any job', before moving to a 'better job'.

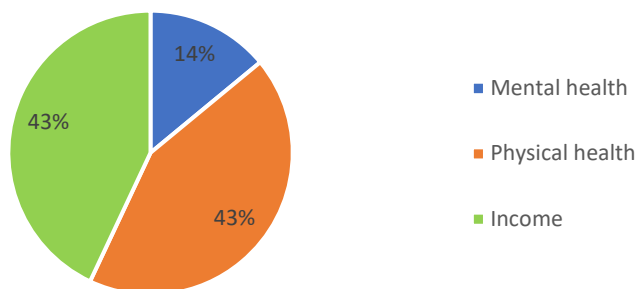
Julia is an example of a participant who moved from 'any job', one "for surviving" as she puts it, to a 'better job'. She now wishes to change to a job more suited to her needs. She describes how she is on a career path:

That's only the beginning of things because I worked in several places like [name of business] - it was horrible, and cleaning in a hotel - so that's for surviving. But I try to do my best so I will have a good reputation; it would be nice for my CV. So, I would like to have an office job because I am kind of older, so I never did any physical job, so I keep on learning and try to find some admin job. But it's good [her current job]; it's a great experience also.

Aspirations to change jobs

As described, some participants, regardless of their level of work satisfaction, wish to change jobs. In all, seven of the 10 participants who were still in employment at final interview wished to change jobs, with four indicating they may wish to change career. Low wages and the impact of work on physical health are the main reasons for wishing to change jobs. None of the participants are impulsive; all are planning their moves.

Figure 4-7 Reasons for wanting to change jobs



- Physical health

Three participants recognise the need to move from their current work because of its impact on their physical health. Two are employed in physically challenging work and one is employed in sedentary work which may be aggravating a recent health concern. None have taken action yet; all are still contemplating a move.

Andy has worked in construction since the start of the research and was employed in manual labour before becoming homeless. Outdoor, physically challenging labour is taking its toll on his body and he is suffering from tennis elbow. (See Impact of work on physical health, page 62.) Despite the challenges, Andy enjoys and values working and is emphatic that he will continue working, although he is starting to consider alternative areas of work:

I don't know what's going to happen to my arms if I keep on going without supporting them. It can't be that good for them what-so-ever... See if I can pick up any new trades along the way. There must be an easier way of doing things.

James has worked as a driver for most of his life. He enjoys his current work, however a recent health scare (see Impact of work on physical health, page 62.), and his doctor's advice, have led him

to re-evaluate his career. He's clear about the benefits of working and is certain he will continue working but is contemplating a career change.

I think I've driven too many kilometers in my lifetime. It's time to consider something entirely different. Ok, I'm gonna stick with it for the time being, but in my heart, I know I can't do this type work for too much longer. But I won't leave this job until I have something else planned properly. I'm going to continue working whatever happens. It's just that I can see that I'll probably have to branch into another line of work eventually.

- Mental health

As described, the lack of challenge in his work clashes with Leon's work ethic, causing him frustration. He is at the point of thinking about what to do about this – he's considering speaking to his manager and considering changing jobs.

- Financial

Three participants wish to move to better paid work and some have taken steps already.

Adam is actively looking for alternative work but is conscious that permanency as well as increased wages are important.

I try to find new job - better job. But I don't want to move to another job to be a General Operative in another place for the same wage. Maybe I will [not] have the safety of the permanent job. I'm looking and every day, I send my CV, but no response.

Frank has a long-term plan; he is pursuing online training that he hopes in time will lead to alternative work.

I'm studying for myself you know. I'm doing a course for data analysis for the future because I think I can move to another place. It's online. It's good because it's something new for me. I'm very good at it! So maybe next year I'll be in position to find something better.

4.6 Where work ended

By final interview, 29% (n.4) of participants with whom contact was maintained were no longer in employment.

Employment for this group of participants had lasted between 4 weeks and 15 months. Most held one job during the research and one participant held two jobs.

Two participants lost work when their short-term contracts ended; two participants resigned. Factors leading to resignation included unsuitable working conditions, poor financial return and personal matters.

Katherine succinctly summed up her practical reasons for resigning:

The hours were too long, the breaks were too short and the distance was too far. And the wage wasn't enough to support travelling as well. It weren't worth it. You're basically on your feet working

for 12 hours with nothing inside you. D'you know what I mean? Starvation like. I couldn't do it no more.

David's decision to resign was multi-faceted. He spoke of his decision to resign stemming from diminished financial return when his company was no longer able to pay overtime, coupled with depression and increased alcohol use:

From start, it was ok, they pay overtime. Later they stop everything. So it's like cutting, cutting, cutting. It's not just me left. Another guy before me left. I don't know... I was sad, you know. Wake up – ahhhh, another day. Of course, I was drinking.

Three of the four participants who were no longer in employment by final interview had expressed enjoyment in their work, or parts of their work, and all could identify benefits to working. As noted in section 7.2.2 (page 70), ratings of confidence and morale increased from first to final interview among those for whom work had ended, just as it did for those still in employment, indicating although employment had ended, its effects may have endured.

At the time of final interview, one of these four participants was seeking employment again with the support of the Employment and Training Team, while injury or illness was preventing the remaining three participants from seeking employment at that time.

Katherine, who was unemployed at the time of final interview, conveyed the frustration she felt with this period of her life. She also highlighted the benefits she had experienced previously through employment, which included helping her to manage her substance use:

This is the longest year I've ever went through in my entire life. I should have been back at work and all like but nah, become homeless.

Oh, I miss just getting out. Just the reason to get up in the morning. What am I gonna do for the rest of the day now? Your choices are limited. You've only three choices - keep doing what you're doing, get drugs or get drink. They're your choices. So, at the moment I'm in the head space of saying, keep doing what you're doing.

I'm hoping I get some sort of cleaning job or something like that. I'd just like now to get up early in the morning - like I always got up early - and just go in and have no one around you.

I'm better off doing something than f**k all because f**k all is driving me crazy.

4.7 Best and hardest parts of work

Best part

Improved mental health, particularly in terms of meaningful occupation and feelings of hope and pride, was at first interview, the most commonly identified 'best part' of starting work.

As the research continues, the most commonly identified 'best part' of work, as identified at follow up interviews²¹, was the enjoyment of good relations with colleagues, indicating participants were integrating well in their workplaces. Good relations at work offer participants social connections and

²¹ At second and third interviews combined.

often friendship. They also offer a positive atmosphere or environment, which can be respite from accommodation or mental health challenges.

Working with my colleagues. There's a brilliant banter between us all. We get on so well; we're after becoming best of friends and we meet up as much as possible and go for a quick drink, what-ever.

Other 'best parts'

Some participants identified the nature of their work as the 'best part' of their work at follow-up interview, commenting on their enjoyment of learning a new skill, or of finding work rewarding or interesting. This reflects the progress made by these participants – each person who identified this as a 'best part', had found their initial jobs gruelling and lacking interest but had progressed to more rewarding work.

It's [a] really interesting job, when nobody wreck your head. It's just a job, but interesting because every time different place, some different solutions; it's interesting.

Some practical 'best parts' of work as identified by participants at follow-up interviews included transport (having the use of a company van or being able to arrange lifts with colleagues) and work not being too physically taxing. These 'best parts' point again to the significant challenges of long commutes and physically challenging work that were identified in the first report, The Early Days.

Hardest part

Coping with physically demanding work was, at first interview, the most commonly identified 'hardest part' of starting work.

As the research continued, two issues emerged equally as the 'hardest part' of work - coping with physically challenging work was again identified, and in equal measure, dealing with pressures at work.

- Coping with physically challenging work

At the start of the research, all 18 participants were employed in physically challenging or active work. By final interview, the majority were still employed in this form of work and a number of participants had experienced workplace injury or strain. Even participants who enjoyed their work commented on the physical toll it could take on their body. This is also reflected in participants wishing to change jobs to ameliorate this impact.

- Pressure at work

Pressure at work was evident to a small extent at first interview, often expressed in terms of 'getting up to speed' with the demands of a new job. This suggests temporary pressure and, as the research progressed, many participants describe adapting to their working life.

At follow up interviews, pressure related more to progress and increased responsibility. Three participants who described pressure had progressed to new jobs, which carried more responsibility, and two participants were in their original jobs but had been promoted.

Jakub finds his work environment demanding at times, but manageable. His experience is common among participants.

Pressure sometimes, not all the time. Sometimes you doing something and you sweating and they saying 'when you gonna be finished? When you gonna be finished?' I know they're under pressure too but it's annoying like, because you trying your best. But like I said, it's not all the time.

Other hardest parts

Other 'hardest parts' of work identified by participants at follow up interviews included a low wage, a lack of challenge and working without a full quota of sleep, because of having to sleep in emergency accommodation.

4.8 The difference working makes

Figure 4-8 The difference working makes



Work could spark great change in participants' lives. For some, work could even transform their lives.

Transformative

Some participants who showed high levels of work satisfaction, described work as transformative to their lives. They highlight a stark contrast between life before this work, when homeless, and life after. As one participant put it, it's like "two different worlds".

Steve credits work that he enjoys and that he is progressing well in as sparking life change. He talks about how working has changed his identity and his disposition:

I didn't think a simple thing like a job could change so many things. It changed a lot, definitely. It can change your whole outlook on life really, if you ask me. Even in the sense of the person that I am now. I was aggressive and a bully. Feel like a different person to be honest. It feels good, like. You don't have to be around trouble and act the hard man. Nice to have a different outlook on life - that it doesn't have to be all drink and drugs. Yeah, definitely, I think my outlook in life is completely different since I started working and getting my act together and getting on my own two feet. Changed me a lot.

James works in a job he enjoys, where his efforts are recognised and rewarded and where he has formed a social circle. He acknowledges the stark difference between life before and after this job:

Oh, it's made a huge difference. It really has. It's a hard, stressful job at times but it really has helped me hugely. Because I lost track of the work side of things because of the situation I found myself in. When homeless and on the streets, you lose all track of the work side of things. And it's like a whole different world. It's like two different worlds. I feel like I'm back in the land of the living. It's been life changing really.

Jakub describes disassociation when he reflects on the time when he was homeless, such is the contrast with his life now:

There were two years which got very dodgy, like. I was heavy drinking and I just couldn't figure it out in my head you know, what's going on. I was out of work, on the dole and now, I just can't imagine how did I survive it? I'm working now and I have savings and I have a van, you know? It's like I got my life back... like I had before. When I have a couple days off, I just can't sit at home doing nothing - it's just boring and annoying me. And still, I managed to do it for a long time. It's like it wasn't me. But... I'm back to normal. That's the simplest explanation of it. I'm actually better than back to normal because I'm better than I was before; I've got much more friends, I do much more activities, the job isn't that stressful. The job is the best-ever, I think.

Mental health benefits

The main mental health benefits of working for participants are identified as:

- Increased confidence and self-esteem:
Changes in identity and outlook; new-found independence; feeling valued and wanted, useful and purposeful develop through work and contribute to increased confidence and self-worth.
- Meaningful use of time:
The mind is kept occupied through work, structure and routine. Work is like a sanctuary for some participants – a place where their mind is kept busy and they are distracted from their thoughts, their worries or their loneliness.

Leon describes the sense of purpose and the confidence that working has given him:
I remember the time I had no reason to move from my bed. Now I have great reason. A friend asks what I'm working as. Sometimes I lied because of shame. Now, I have no fear.

Steve describes re-discovering himself:

I feel like myself. I haven't felt like myself in a long time. Yeah, it's good to be who you are. Be where you want to be really. Everything in my life is different, for better.

Katherine talks about the importance of occupation for her mental health:

I think working is great for the head. I think everybody should at least have the opportunity. Either voluntary or something they like doing because you have to keep the brain going. Work is very good for mental health.

Social health benefit - Enhanced social integration

Work provides opportunities for socialisation, the development of social skills and contributes to participants feeling part of society.

This is reflected in participants identifying positive rapport with colleagues as the 'best part' of work.

Steve talks about developing social skills: I can sit down and talk to people and socialise with people - it wasn't something I was able to do before. I get on with people as well like. It's not difficult, like before.

James: It [work] gives you all sorts of opportunities. Work is crucial really, actually. Only for work I wouldn't have met all these lovely people.

Julia: It helps me to socialise. I have new friends. I'm a part of the society. I think it's very positive.

Social health benefit - Positive impact on family relationships

Supporting family and improving access and relationships with children were strong motivating factors for many participants when returning to work. These goals were often achieved.

Income enabled participants to support family and, in one participant's case, to deepen relationships by allowing her to plan an overseas trip to visit family.

Where participants re-established contact with family, or began to identify as a positive role model to their children, it was their growth in confidence and pride through employment and independent housing, alongside diminishing feelings of shame and stigma associated with homelessness, that supported these changes, indicating again the connection between employment, identity and self-esteem.

Manage problematic use of alcohol, drugs or gambling

Through structure, routine and meaningful use of time, work supported many participants to manage their use of alcohol, drugs or gambling. Half of participants reported that working helped them to manage such use, with those that it helped reporting that it helped significantly.

Independence (financial, housing and control over one's own life)

Participants relish the independence that working brings to their lives. Participants refer to financial independence, housing independence and the ability to exercise control over the direction of one's life. 'Satisfaction', 'happy' and 'confident' are words participants used to describe how this makes them feel.

As with many, housing was a goal for Andy when he returned to work. He encountered frustrations and disappointments in his attempts to secure private rented accommodation but when he finally did, the freedom and independence it brought him were joyful:

Having that feeling that I'm able to live out by myself without anybody having their beady eyes on me is something unnatural. D'you know, inside the Simons you have cameras left, right and centre. That's what I mean by beady eye. You don't have that on top of you. You can do what-ever you choose inside your house. You can have it the way you see fit and Good Lord, it is absolutely marvellous like.

James talks about work enabling financial independence and the effect this has on his self-esteem:

I suppose satisfaction. I'm well able to pay my own way in this world; don't have to depend on anybody. I feel like I can be my own man again. Gives me that independence that I didn't have before.

Frank pulls together independence, structure and normality in the benefits that working bring to his life:

Working now is around the normality - a little bit of control in your life. I control my life, you know. I have my income, I can decide to do things, or not. Routine is good.

5 HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

KEY DATA

- The number of participants in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation reduced by half, from 71% to 35%, from the time participants started work to the time of final interview.
- The number of participants in independent housing (private rented [net increase 2] or social housing [increase 3]) almost trebled, from 21% to 57%, from the time participants started work to the time of final interview.
- Securing independent housing (private rented or social housing) brought an enormous sense of relief and bolstered feelings of independence and security.
- However, the need for safe, affordable, long-term, independent housing remains a critical issue for 50% (n.7) of participants at final interview – the majority of whom are in employment.

- Tracking participants accommodation over the research period highlights the insecurity of the private rented market. (12 private rented tenancies were recorded during the course of the research, but only five remained at final interview. As three private rented tenancies were in place before the research began, there was a net gain of just two private rented tenancies).
- Lack of available, affordable, long-term housing was the main barrier to securing private rented accommodation. Intense competition and perceived prejudice on the basis of appearances and the need to search further and further outside the city were identified as sub-barriers. The challenge of taking time off work to search for housing was also referred to.
- Employment and references are no guarantee to securing private rented housing, which can cause disillusionment, and there is an understandable sense of weariness among some participants in their search for private rented accommodation.
- Private rented tenancies were lost due to the sale of property, over-crowding, loss of income and the ending of leases under what participants described as false pretences.

- 50% of participants experienced one to two accommodation types during the research; 50% experienced between three and 10 accommodation types, which included periods of rough sleeping. Four participants experienced an episode of rough sleeping – three of whom were in employment at the time.
- Housing difficulties challenged one third of participants' ability to work.

5.1 Tracking changes

Examining accommodation for the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained from the time they started work to the time of final interview (mean average of 21 months) shows:

- The number of participants in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation reduced by half (from 71% to 35%).
- The number of participants in independent housing (private rented or social housing) almost trebled (from 21% to 57%).
- The increase in independent housing came through social housing (3 tenancies) and private rented accommodation (net increase of 2 tenancies).
- Stable, safe and affordable housing remains a critical issue for 50% (n.7) of participants; six of whom are in emergency, temporary insecure or temporary supported accommodation and one of whom is suffering harassment in his private rented accommodation but has been unable to find alternative accommodation.

Figure 5-1 Accommodation at start of work among 14 participants.

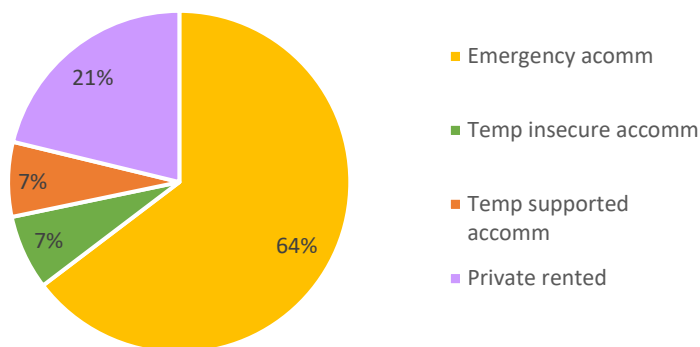
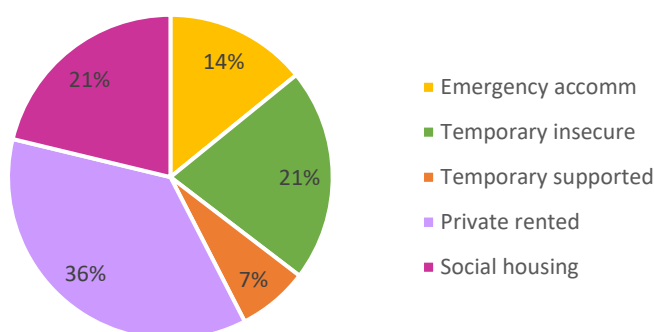
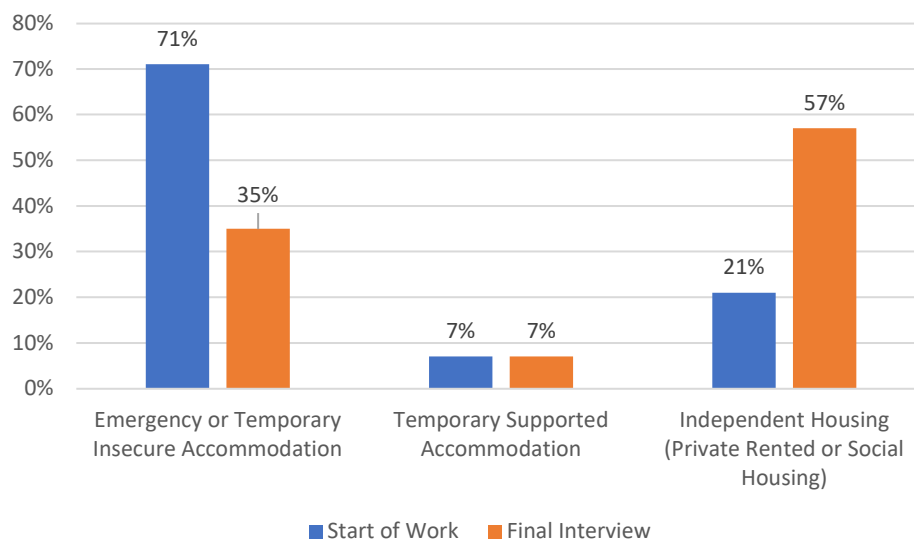


Figure 5-2 Accommodation at final interview among 14 participants.



- Nine participants (64%) were in emergency accommodation as they started work. This reduced to two participants (14%) at final interview, one of whom was in employment.
- One participant (7%) was staying in temporary insecure accommodation as they started work. This increased to three participants (21%) at final interview²², two of whom were in employment.
- One participant (7%) was staying in supported temporary accommodation as they started work. This remained at one participant at final interview. This participant was in employment.
- Three participants (21%) were in private rented accommodation as they started work. This increased to five participants (36%) at final interview, four of whom were in employment.
- No one was in social housing as they started work. Three participants (17%) were in social housing at final interview, two of whom were in employment.

Figure 5-3 Accommodation type grouped at start of work and at final interview among 14 participants.



²² One participant was staying short-term with an extended family member; one participant was staying with his partner's family in over-crowded, tense conditions and one participant was staying with friends.

Table 5-1 Accommodation breakdown over course of research among 14 participants.

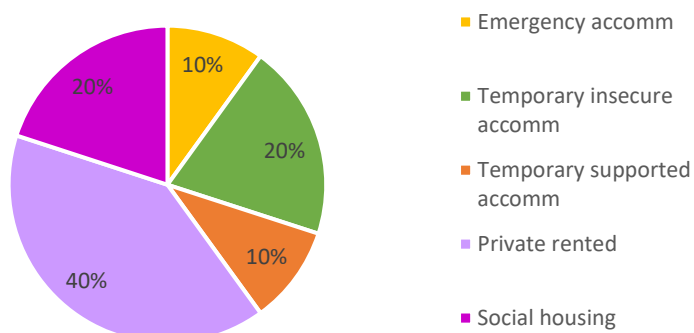
		Total at Start of Work	Total during Research Period	Total at Final Interview	In Employment at Final Interview
1.	Emergency or Temporary Insecure Accommodation	71% (n.10)	86% (n.12)	35% (n.5)	3
	<i>Emergency</i>	64% (n.9)	71% (n.10)	14% (n.2)	1
	<i>Temporary Insecure</i>	7%	36% (n.5)	21% (n.3)	2
2.	Temporary Supported Accommodation	7%	7%	7% (n.1)	1
3.	Independent Accommodation	21% (n.3)	86% (n.12)	57% (n.8)	6
	<i>Private Rented</i>	21% (n.3)	71% (n.10)	36% (n.5)	4
	<i>Social Housing</i>	0%	21% (n.3)	21% (n.3)	2

Accommodation among participants in employment at final interview

60% of participants in employment at final interview were in independent housing - 40% in private rented accommodation, 20% in social housing.

The remaining 40% of participants in employment at final interview were in need of independent housing – 10% were staying in emergency accommodation, 20% were in temporary insecure accommodation (staying with friends/family) and 10% were in temporary supported accommodation.

Table 5-2 Accommodation among 10 participants in employment at final interview.



5.2 Private rented accommodation

Insecurity of the private rented market

Tracking participants accommodation over the course of the research highlights the insecurity of the private rented market.

Three participants held private rented tenancies as they started work, tenancies that had been secured before the research began. As the research progressed, employment enabled seven more participants to move to private rented accommodation. (These seven participants held nine tenancies between them during the research period – that is, two participants held two tenancies each and the remaining five participants held one tenancy each during the research period).

However, by final interview, just five participant’s tenancies remained.

As three tenancies were in place before the start of the research, there was a net gain of just two private rented tenancies from the start to the end of the research.

Table 5-3 Gains and losses in private rented accommodation.

Private Rented Accommodation (PRA)	Tenancies	Participants
PRA at start of research (secured before research began)	3	3
PRA gained during research	9	7
PRA lost during research	7	5
PRA at end of research	5	5
Net increase in private rented accommodation	2	2

Reasons for seven tenancies ending during the research period:

- Short-term lease ended with planned sale of property.
- Leases ended under what participants describe as false pretences, as experienced by two participants. See David’ story below.
- Lease surrender following change in income. See Cedric’s story below.
- Evictions due to over-crowding²³, as experienced by two participants.
- Progression to more suitable private rented accommodation.

²³ Eviction, for one participant, resulted when extended family members moved in, putting the participant in breach of his lease. Unbeknownst to another participant, his name was not put on a house-share lease, leading to his eviction from an over-crowded house.

David' Story

Two participants experienced their leases ending under what participants describe as false pretences. David describes his experience:

Landlord refurbished and raise price for 40%. He just... 'you need to move'. And he said he will be living himself, but he didn't. Because I saw on Daft that apartment new to the market, just 40% dearer. After that, it's hard to find. Two years ago, it's hard to find. Now, it's even harder.

Cedric's Story

Following a work-place injury, Cedric surrendered his lease in a rural area as he could no longer afford both rent and travel expenses. Cedric's experience reflects other commentary in the research about the housing shortage and how participants are forced to search further and further from the city. Accommodation in rural, and in Cedric's case isolated, areas is only possible if transport can also be afforded:

It [Injury Benefit] was only €196 and I had to pay €100 rent plus insurance on the car plus bills plus normal expenses for food. I just made some calculations and say it won't be enough and I decided just to move. Because there's no point just to stay on to pay rent, even I couldn't afford to pay insurance. On top of that, bills. And it was in [a rural area] you know, quite far. Even to go shopping, I would need the car. I said there's no point for me to stay there.

The struggle to secure private rented accommodation

There is a sense of weariness among some participants in their search for private rented accommodation with references to long queues, to short-listing based on appearances and to a general feeling that they are wasting their time.

Barriers experienced by participants to securing private rented accommodation included:

1. Lack of available, affordable housing
2. Intense competition to secure housing
3. Perceived discrimination on the basis of appearances
4. The need to search further and further from the city (from employment and regular public transport) to secure housing
5. The challenge of taking time off work to search for housing

When Andy began working, he assumed he would be in a good position to secure private rented accommodation and move out of emergency accommodation. He found the barriers he encountered demotivating and his prolonged stay in emergency accommodation played on his conscience:

My idea of going back into work was to stay well away from all the homeless services. I assumed when I got back into work, where I could show a weekly income to a landlord, I'd be able to get a house. It still motivates me, but it doesn't motivate me as much as it first did. I had it in my head that if someone was working, able to show a weekly income, I'd be able to get a house no problem. But it's not easy what-so-ever.

I'm doing my God damn hardest to get me and my partner out of there [the Shelter] and it's just like a smack in the face every time we get turned down for a gaff. I was told the other day that it could

be because of my stature - someone walking up that looks like me - they can feel intimidated straight away and they've made their judgement as soon as I open their gate. How can I do anything about that? So now we been sending herself to see if she gets anywhere.

It's more upsetting than anything else. It's not helping no body. Like if the two of us had a gaff there'd be two free beds that someone else may privilege from that are out living in the streets, instead of two people that have the money to move into a place, that are sober, and not being able to get one. It's actually a kick in the teeth. It's extremely hard. And that's when your conscience starts coming into play - that you're feeling now for people that actually need a bed and not you.

I'm gonna have to get something sorted soon because I can't stay in there another couple of months - that place [the shelter] will take its toll on you.

Steve describes how even with two full-time incomes he and his partner have not been able to secure a one bed apartment:

It's hard now alright. We went about two weeks ago down to a place and like we were there about half an hour before the viewing and there was literally a queue outside the door and I said, 'c'mon, there's no way'. It's very hard - especially to get it close to work for me and close to work for her. Like we both have full time jobs and we work five days a week and even one bed apartments, we still can't afford them and paying bills then like... it's just madness.

Frank is struggling to find affordable accommodation two hours outside of Cork for his family:

Accommodation is the problem. I thought that maybe I can rent something far, far away - maybe they [his family] stay there during the week and I go on days off to visit them to begin. I'm looking now, but you know, the prices are crazy. Really crazy.

David and Gabriel both spoke about the stress and difficulty of trying to find housing when working:

Gabriel had to take time-off at short notice during a busy period in work to search for new accommodation when his temporary accommodation abruptly ended. He described the stress and difficulty this created:

We got a notice, we had 4 weeks to find a new place, because you know, the other one was temporary and I had to miss work. He [his manager] told me take a couple of days and I told him, 'it's nearly impossible to find an apartment and to meet people in those two days' and well, I didn't come to work that week and I told him, 'this is my life, this is my priority. I don't care about that [work] if I'm living on the street.' It was complicated that week, but it's fine now. It was difficult at such short notice. It was complicated.

David: I'm busy and I no time to looking for apartments. Because I one [day] can be in Cork, next day in West Cork, third day in Dublin. And you come and it's a queue and they picking sometimes face. Just waste of time sometimes, you know.

Employer support to secure private rented accommodation

There are accounts of employers trying to help participants find accommodation. One employer secured temporary accommodation for his employee when his private rented accommodation ended abruptly. Another employer, aware of his employee's precarious situation in temporary insecure accommodation spoke to T.D.s and often searched Daft on his behalf.

Employment and private rented accommodation

Employment supported 50% (n.7) of participants to secure private rented accommodation.

All but two participants, who secured social housing early in the research, were seeking private rented accommodation.

About one third of participants experienced housing difficulties as the research continued which directly or indirectly challenged their ability to work. These ranged from homelessness (staying in emergency accommodation or rough sleeping²⁴) to a housing crisis (an urgent need to find alternative accommodation²⁵) to the impact of the effects of housing insecurity (including increased problematic alcohol or drug use and deteriorating mental health²⁶).

5.3 Independent housing – the positives

Figure 5-4 Independent housing - the positives.



Securing independent housing was a key goal for most in returning to work. Where this was achieved, it brought joy and relief and a strong sense of independence and security.

Two participants directly credit independent housing with helping them to manage their alcohol use. (See Working and housing help manage problematic use, page 80)

²⁴ See Steve’s story, page 53 and Cedric’s story, page 55.

²⁵ See Gabriel’s account, page 50.

²⁶ See David’s story, page 53

For Jakub, independent housing has been transformative to his life and mind-set: It makes all the difference. My mind turn-around absolutely. I know I have to take care of it. I know I have to pay my rent. I cook what I like. I buy what I like. This has changed my life.

Katherine expressed her relief and appreciation in securing social housing in terms of safety, security, independence and her mental health:

Thank God I don't have to worry about what time I'm gonna get in [to the emergency shelter] tonight; the stability. Having independence - I can have my own shower, when I want; I can have my own peace and quiet; I can have my own sanity.

I was in shock really for a month. I think safe is most got to do with it. Knowing that this is yours and you can leave anything you want around the place – money, anything and you come back and it's still there. It's just knowing that you have that safety.

I was sick of landlords giving me the run-around. Just praying for one day that someone can't say you have to move on. That's a great security in someone's life. I know everybody can't get it at the moment, but everybody should have it.

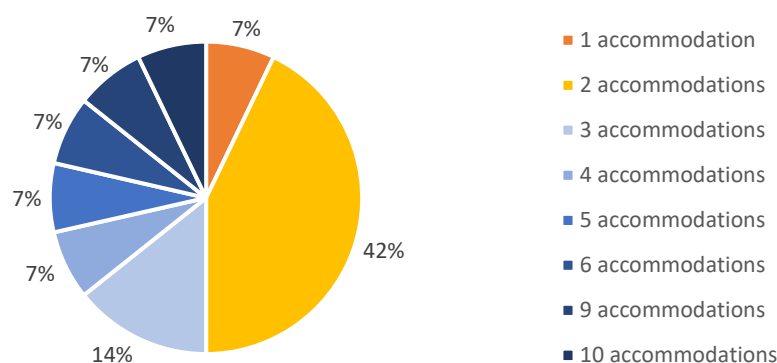
In a later interview Katherine spoke about her hopes for the future. She's confident that with secure housing, she will fulfil her goals.

Get everything back to normal. Then just carry on, but hopefully start doing something productive with my life. If I get a chance to go on a course, that I stick it out... and I know I'll stick it out 'cause I have the stability of my own place.

5.4 Housing instability

Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, almost 50% held one or two accommodations during the research period. The remaining 50% experienced between three and 10 accommodations. Accommodations, in this instance, includes periods of rough sleeping so as to count these periods.

Figure 5-5 Number of accommodations (including periods of rough sleeping) recorded over the course of the research for 14 participants.



- Just one participant (7%) remained in the same private rented accommodation from the start to the end of the research period. However, he experienced harassment at this accommodation which significantly impacted his mental health, but he could not find alternative affordable accommodation.
- 42% of participants (n.6), held two accommodations during the research period. All progressed to better accommodation with five participants moving to private rented or social housing and one participant moving to temporary supported accommodation.
- The remaining 50% (n.7) of participants experienced between three and 10 accommodations with periods of rough sleeping included as an accommodation so as to count these incidents. By final interview, two of the seven participants from this group were in secure independent housing (private rented or social housing). The remaining five participants were in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation. Injury, illness, poor mental health, problematic alcohol or drug use or gambling and a lack of affordable, secure housing all contributed to participants' housing instability.

Participants experiences of housing instability

David's story

David experienced nine accommodation moves throughout the research including rough sleeping. He held two jobs during the course of the research and was unemployed at final interview. He recounts some of his accommodation experiences during the time of his employment and the impact on his mental health:

Landlord refurbished and raise price for 40%. He just... 'you need to move'. And he said he will be living himself, but he didn't. Because I saw on Daft that apartment new to the market, just 40% dearer. After that, it's hard to find. So two years ago it's hard to find. Now it's even harder. I live for a while in [emergency accommodation]. So, I later find some place, one friend recommend it. It was very good place. Six months there then I moved to shared - but they never put me on books and never told landlord what's happening. So, landlord came and threw me out. Later I find another one, but it was like, also without agreement. If you're not signing any papers, so they can throw out any time they want. So, then I living in van for a while. Later I stay for 10 days in my friend's place. Then again in the van. And after that find some accommodation. So, two weeks no money, no work [following an injury] - lost accommodation. Next time, after two months and again, it's like puff. Too much like you know, why me again? Small bit of depression. It's mostly you know, when you lonely. And in those places, just no body to talk to. You sleep in the van and it's like no one to talk to.

Steve's story

Steve experienced 10 accommodation moves through-out the research including rough sleeping. He was employed 19 months at the time of final interview in a job he enjoyed and was progressing well in. However, he started this job while staying in a tent. He went on to experience considerable housing upheaval, while holding down work. By final interview, he was staying in pressurised, temporary insecure accommodation and searching without success for affordable private rented accommodation. Below, Steve describes a number of his moves:

I was staying in a tent. And it was cold like. Even though it was the summer, it was freezing. And then, if it was raining, come back and everything soaked. Sometimes come back and your clothes and everything be gone. So most of the time I was carrying around bags full of clothes. Three, four bags of clothes - all day. And you'd be killed out from no food, nothing. Rough like.

I remember the first day I was late, and she [his manager] was like, 'why are ya late?' And I had to come up with some excuse like, saying I forgot something there and I had to run home. Sure, I didn't have to run home - I had no-where to run home to, d'you know what I mean? But then she was asking like, 'what's going on, why were you late in the first place?'

And then they're asking 'where are ya staying?' And they're like 'how come you can't wash your clothes?' I was stressed off my head. I'd say they could kinda know like. Everything was kinda adding up for them. Then I kinda got caught out and I just had to say it... 'here look, I'm homeless'. And they were like, 'why didn't you just tell us?'

After the first week anyway, I got a few quid and I was kinda staying in hostels. But couldn't keep doing that like; 20, 30 quid like for a hostel. Eventually you're working for nothing, like. Just working for somewhere to stay really. Oh, it was just hectic boy. Every day, like, running around and then going to work and then trying to book a hostel after work.

I found it [private rented accommodation] on Facebook. I went up and this woman said 'look, I just need references from your job' and I got a reference and she was like 'yeah, no problem'. She said, 'it's only gonna be short-term like, before I sell the house, like'. Six months and then out and back to square one.

For a few weeks I was in hostels and one or two nights I did have to stay outside and my friend let me stay in his car. But then my girlfriend's mam said, 'look, you can't stay outside like, so look, you can stay here. But we'll have to sort something out cause we're all gonna explode inside there. Ah, it's just mental like to be honest.

It's very hard. I just think there's no way we're ever gonna get a house. Not with the way things are now - for the next 10 years at least. And we're kinda on thin ice in the house d'you know, with everyone living there.

5.5 Homelessness

Sleeping Rough

During the course of the research, four participants reported they had slept rough. All four slept rough on the street while one also slept in a van and another slept in a car and a tent.

Three were in employment when they slept rough.

Sleeping rough is detailed in both Steve's and David's stories of housing instability above.

Emergency Accommodation

Table 5-4 Fluctuations in the number of participants in emergency accommodation throughout the research.

Timeline	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
In emergency accommodation at start of work	9	64%
Moved out of emergency accommodation	- 8	
Returned to emergency accommodation	+ 2	
Moved out of emergency accommodation again	- 1	
In emergency accommodation at final interview	2	14%

By final interview, the number of participants in emergency accommodation had reduced from nine to two. One participant remained in emergency accommodation for the duration of the research. (He became unemployed when his short-term contract ended and he remained unemployed for the remainder of the research).

During the course of the research, two participants, Cedric and Katherine, experienced a return to emergency accommodation, which they found particularly difficult. By final interview Cedric remained in emergency accommodation, while Katherine had moved to social housing. They describe the considerable stress and difficulty they experienced on their return to emergency accommodation.

Cedric's story

Following a workplace injury and a reduction in his income, Cedric felt he had no choice but to surrender his private rented accommodation. For the next 12 months he stayed in emergency accommodation. At the time of final interview, he had managed to return to work despite still being in pain from his injury and despite staying at the Nightlight²⁷. He describes obstacles to working and staying in emergency accommodation and the coping strategies he adopts in order to survive. He also refers to the stigma of homelessness and how he conceals his situation at work. He shows resilience and optimism in the face of it all.

You have to leave the building, the Nightlight, 7.30am, and you can come back 9 o'clock. So what I do, I'm coming back, having a shower, having breakfast, pulling out some chairs and sleeping on the chairs for a couple of hours. Literally a couple of hours. Shift starts at 4 o'clock and finished at 1, 2, could be 2.30am. I'm going to the Nightlight, but I'm not guaranteed. I got lucky three times. They told me straight, they can't guarantee it. What happens if I come back and there's no bed for me? I have to grab a sleeping bag to sleep rough outside and to go back to work. They are trying to do their best just to provide me a place to sleep. What can I say, it's difficult. It's rough, to work 10-hour shift and come back and sleep four hours and after that spend some time on the streets and after that, back to work. I hide everything from work all the time... homeless. Because I want to feel like normal. I don't want them to point me with the finger 'oh he's homeless'.

²⁷ The Nightlight operates from the Day Centre in Cork Simon's Emergency Shelter. It offers basic shelter; mattresses and sleeping bags on the floor. The Nightlight opened in November 2017 as a temporary measure and has remained in place since, such is demand. The Day Centre now operates 24 hours a day. Specialist services operate from The Day Centre during the day, followed by the Soup Run in the evening, followed by the Nightlight which opens at 11pm and closes at 7.30am to facilitate the resumption of day services.

But I have a motivation - I want back to normal life and that's it. This is the one thing telling me not to give up. So now, just because I don't have accommodation, just to quit everything after such effort that I put into all this stuff, I said no. I have to keep going. Even if I'm feeling too tired. Like for tomorrow, I take a day off - I say, I have to go to the dentist - to have a proper rest during the day and after that back for another two days. Like I'm supposed to work six days - I'll be working five days. A couple of weeks and I'll be alright. Once I get my own accommodation... I'll have proper rest and I can work six days a week.

Katherine's story

Katherine experienced a return to emergency accommodation during the research. She describes the toll it took on her mental health and how she found the emergency shelter environment reignited her problematic alcohol use and made a return to college, and progressing her life, unthinkable at that time.

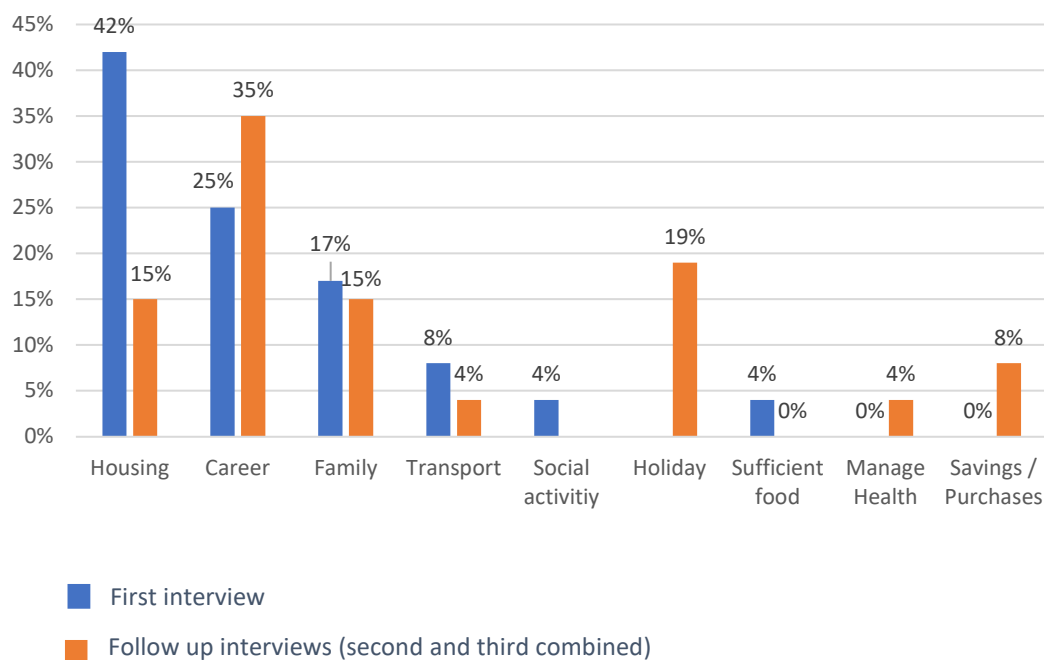
With the homeless crisis, trying to get a B&B in Cork or a hostel was nearly impossible. That was a very stressful time.

Being through the homeless services, not that I don't appreciate it, but it is too stressful for me. I get no peace. I get no nothing. This is the longest year I've ever went through in my entire life. It was basically, some experience. Some experience that I never seen before. My head was all over the place. Three weeks I used to be going drinking - I didn't care. I was like, I can't do this. I was saying, right, I'll try, start again and all this but in there [emergency accommodation] it's just around you all the time, d'you know. As much as you're trying to stay away, there's always some temptation there. It was just too much for me 'cause I was on the verge of just f**king snapping inside there.

She [Employment & Training Coordinator] wanted me to do the college and I said, 'how the f**k am I supposed to do college in circumstances like this?'

6 CHANGING GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS

Figure 6-1 Goals as participants started work and at follow up²⁸ interviews.



Changing goals reveal progress and new aspirations in participants' lives.

As the research progressed, housing goals were achieved by many; career-related goals increased and changed from an emphasis on securing work to an emphasis on progressing a career; new goals concerning holidays, savings and purchases emerged, indicating improved finances, new aspirations and a sense of living rather than surviving.

While housing was the dominant goal at the start of the research, career became the dominant goal as the research continued.

Securing work again was the main career goal at the start of the research, while progressing a career, mainly through changing jobs, became the main career goal as the research continued.

Among participants who expressed a career goal at the start of the research, two-thirds were unemployed and wanted to secure work again, while one-third were in employment and wished to progress their careers. As the research continued, this flipped, with two-third of participants who expressed a career goal now in employed and wishing to change jobs and one-third unemployed and wanting to secure work again.

²⁸ Goals from second and third interviews are combined. Unique goals were counted once (i.e. if a participant mentioned the same goal in their second and third interview, that goal was counted once. If a participant mentioned different goals in their second and third interviews, both those goals were counted).

Steve’s goals at first and final interview indicate how his life has progressed from survival to living. While housing remained a goal at final interview, Steve highlights a steady, methodical approach to achieving this.

First interview: *Once I've a roof over my head and a bit of grub in my mouth, I'll be as happy boy 'cause you've a lot more than others have then.*

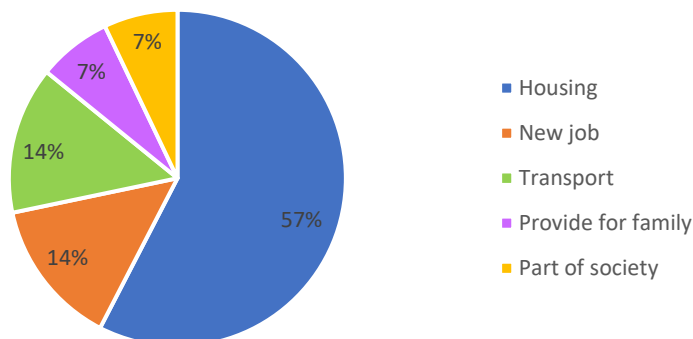
Final interview: *Just day by day, one step at a time and I'll get there eventually. Not one big jump and I'll be there, I know that. Next thing now is a house. Eventually... I know it mightn't come today, I know it mightn't come tomorrow, but eventually. Keep working hard. Put your mind to anything and you'll get it like. That's the next thing, a house. But everyday trying to take steps towards it. Just keep the head steady and keep looking forward instead of backwards. Get out more. Do a bit of travelling. I have a few things in my head. I don't exactly have it planned out, but I know where I want to be. Holiday now wouldn't be bad. A few steps closer to getting a house.*

Goals achieved

76% of goals noted by participants in their first interview were achieved by their final interview – a testament to the commitment and determination of the participants.

Goals achieved were predominantly housing related. Other goals achieved related to securing new work, gaining transport, providing for family and feeling a part of society.

Figure 6-2 Goals achieved from first interview.



Some examples of goals achieved include Leon buying a scooter - *“I realised a dream”* – which as well as giving him a sense of independence and achievement, enabled him to see more of his children.

James, with the support of the Employment and Training Team, gained the outstanding modules for his truck driving licence, enabling him to secure work in a related area.

Julia achieved her hat trick – housing, a new job and to feel a part of society.

Three participants achieved and subsequently lost their housing goals. By final interview these goals were to the fore of their minds again.

Goals Outstanding

24% of goals noted by participants in their first interview were still in progress by their final interviews. These goals were predominantly housing related. Some related to family.

Leon outlined a number of different goals during his first and second interviews. By the time of his third interview, he had reduced his goals to just one, critical, outstanding goal - *"I have to change flat – the rest is so simple"* – reflecting his urgent need to find alternative private rented accommodation.

7 THREE PILLARS OF HEALTH

7.1 Physical Health

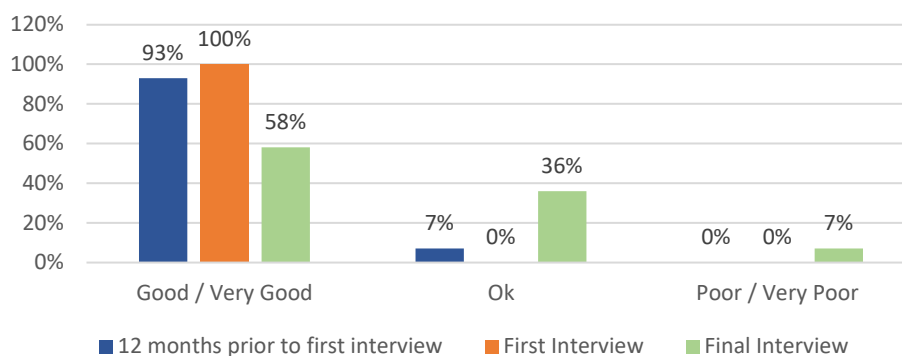
KEY DATA – Physical Health

- At the time of moving into work, all participants reported 'good' or 'very good' physical health. However, by final interview, many participants had experienced physical health illness, injury or strain. Some experienced serious illness or injury, for example one participant suffered a heart attack while another suffered two slipped discs which left him unable to work for 11 months. Illness or injury were preventing two of the four participants who were unemployed at final interview from working and a number of participants in employment at final interview wished to change jobs so as to ameliorate the physical impact of their current work on their bodies.
- More than half of participants rated their physical health lower at the time of final interview compared to the time of first interview. Some decreases in physical health ratings were minor (from 'very good' to 'good'). But 43% reported more significant decreases which moved their physical health ratings into the categories of 'ok' or 'poor' at final interview.
- The reasons for 43% (n.6) of participants rating their physical health at these low points ('ok' or 'poor') at final interview included workplace injury or strain, experienced by three participants, and illness, also experienced by three participants.
- Over the course of the research, over a third of participants (36% - n.5) commented on how their work had a detrimental effect on their physical health - two participants suffered work-place injuries, two suffered work-related strains and one participant's work environment may have aggravated a recently developed health concern.
- However, work is a double-edged sword; all those whose physical health was impacted by work see social and psychological benefits to working. Many enjoy and value their work and plan to continue working, with some planning to transition to alternative areas of work that are more physically suited to them.

7.1.1 Physical health ratings, improvements and dis-improvements

58% rated their physical health as 'good' or 'very good' at final interview

Figure 7-1 Change in physical health ratings over three time points among 14 participants.

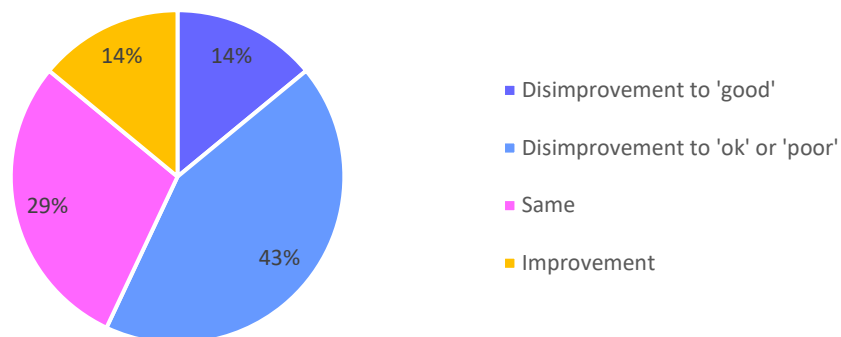


Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, 93% rated their physical health as 'good' or 'very good' in the 12 months prior to first interview. This increased to 100% at the time of first interview but by final interview had decreased to 58%.

Conversely, 7% rated their physical health as 'ok' or 'poor/very poor' in the 12 months prior to first interview, this decreased to 0% at the time of first interview but by final interview had increased to 43%.

57% recorded dis-improved physical health at final interview

Figure 7-2 Changes in physical health ratings from first to final interview among 14 participants.



- 57% (n.8) reported a dis-improvement in their physical health at final interview compared to first interview.
 - Among them, 14% (n.2) indicated minor dis-improvements: their self-assessed rating changed from 'very good' at first interview to 'good' at final interview.
 - 43% (n.6) noted more significant dis-improvements: their self-assessed rating moved them into the categories of 'ok' or 'poor' at final interview.
- 29% (n4) rated their physical health at the same point at the first and at final interview.
- 14% (n.2) noted minor improvements in their physical health: their self-assessed rating changed from 'good' at first interview to 'very good' at final interview.

Reasons for dis-improved physical health, as noted by 57% (8 participants):

- Three participants suffered work-place injury or strain.
- Three participants developed health concerns – heart attack, heart condition and undiagnosed chronic pain.
- Two participants reduced physical health ratings still left them in the self-selected category of 'good' health and no reasons were given for these minor dis-improvements.

Reasons for improved physical health, as noted by 14% (two participants):

- Neither participant commented on their improved physical health ratings. One participant did however comment in general on how his lifestyle changed since starting work – he no longer has time for, or interest in, alcohol or drugs and he has started attending a gym.

7.1.2 Impact of work on physical health

36%, or five of the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, referred to their work as having a detrimental effect, to a greater or lesser extent, on their physical health.

Table 7-1 Detrimental effect of employment on physical health.

Effect	Ailment	Type of work	Effect on employment
2 x workplace injuries	Back injury	Manual work	Unable to work and received Injury Benefit. Returned to employment at end of research.
	Finger injury. Also, chronic back pain related to long-term manual work – awaiting diagnosis.	Manual work	Unable to work. Chose not to claim Injury Benefit – is being supported by friends.
2 x work-related repetitive strain injuries	Tennis elbow	Manual work	In employment and considering transitioning to alternative work due to physical strain.
	Foot pain	Manual work	In employment and planning to transition to alternative work for economic reasons.
1 x work environment aggravating health concern	Heart condition	Sedentary work	In employment and on medical advice is considering transitioning to alternative employment.

Workplace injury

David's health rating changed from 'good' at the time of first interview to 'ok' at the time of final interview. He suffered an injury to his finger at work. He also suffers back pain related to long-term manual work. At final interview he was not working due to his injury and pain.

Ok... but just ok. I still can breath. I can see. When I'm not moving [the finger] - no pain; just when I move. But you see it's not the skin I cut, it's that piece of bone. So you see, I don't think even surgery helping. So, this arm [has now] lost 15 / 20% of lifting.

I'm tired. I'm just tired from pain. I can't breath one moment with pain - it's like nail in the back.

Cedric suffered a back injury and his health rating changed from 'very good' at first interview to 'ok' at final interview. His loss of work led to loss of private rented accommodation and a return to emergency accommodation. By final interview he had returned to work as he felt employment was his best route to treatment, private rented accommodation and "a normal life".

I was lifting on my own and it was raining and one hand just slipped and two discs went. My spine was bended in two places. I still feel the pain but I'm taking the painkillers when the really strong pain is coming up. I still need treatment but if I go to treatment, I need money. Social welfare is not enough; I have to work. So, I decided I'll go back to work, I'll see how long it goes, how long I can resist, to accumulate some money and after that maybe start treatment.

Workplace strain

Andy's physical health rating changed from 'good' at the time of first interview to 'ok' at final interview. He enjoys and puts great effort into his work, but at final interview spoke about the strain on his body from long-term physically demanding outdoor work. He is the one participant to still endure a physically challenging commute, which compounds the challenge of physical work.

The amount of walking I have to do just to get to work. The amount of pain I have to absorb while I'm working. I've got tennis elbows in both my elbows at the moment. That's draining me. I'm cold every day. Touching steel with your bare hands is not a nice sensation. In my own body I can feel myself getting weaker. I can feel myself wanting to stay in bed a lot longer.

Despite these issues, Andy enjoys and values working and is emphatic that he will continue working, although he is starting to consider alternative areas of work:

Without a shadow of a doubt. Course I will [continue working]. I don't even like taking days off work. See if I can pick up any new trades along the way. There must be an easier way of doing things.

Frank's physical health rating remained the same from first to final interview, but he comments on the impact of repetitive strain in a physically challenging job.

I had a problem with my foot. I have pain when I work. Some days it's hard, some days not. Because in the position that I work now, I must walk so much every day. I walk between 17 and 22 kilometers every day. You move maybe two meters only, but you know you are all the time walking. I take some medication to try to reduce the inflammation. I checking by internet because it's not something that you must go to the doctor. There is not a solution you know. It's something like your behaviour. I have Ibuprofen with me and maybe sometimes I must take a pill or two.

Work aggravating health

James' physical health rating changed from 'very good' at the time of first interview to 'ok' at the time of final interview. At the time of final interview, James a heart issue had led to a period of hospitalisation. While working did not cause this issue, his working conditions may have aggravated it and may be a concern for his future health:

You see, I'm sitting down too long which is leading to a concern and this last two weeks I'm having [a] major re-think about this particular job. I was getting cramps in the back of my leg and that's from, you know when you're in [a] sitting position for 12 hours in a day, very little exercise - ok, I jump out as much as I can, but you've only very limited opportunities jumping out of the cab. Most of your day you're in the cab and you're watching everything. She [his doctor] says 'will you ever consider doing something else?' I think it's coming to the point I will have to consider doing something else. I think I've driven too many kilometers in my lifetime. It's time to consider something entirely different. But I won't leave this job until I have something else planned properly. I'm going to continue working whatever happens.

Double-edged sword

Participants who identified work as detrimental to some degree to their physical health also note benefits to working, commenting on the positive impact it has on their lives. Many enjoy, value and appreciate their work and plan to continue working.

Andy: I'm out of the Simons and I'm still sober. I'm just delighted to be alive. I took life for granted when I was drinking, d'you know. And I won't take it for granted no more. Working has a lot to do with it. It really does. But then it's draining me inside. It may not be draining me on the outside, but it is draining me on the inside.

James: It's made a huge difference. It really has, it has been life changing really. The only crib I would have is that it may have affected my health a bit. That would be the downside. But it's more upside than downside - that's the way I look at it.

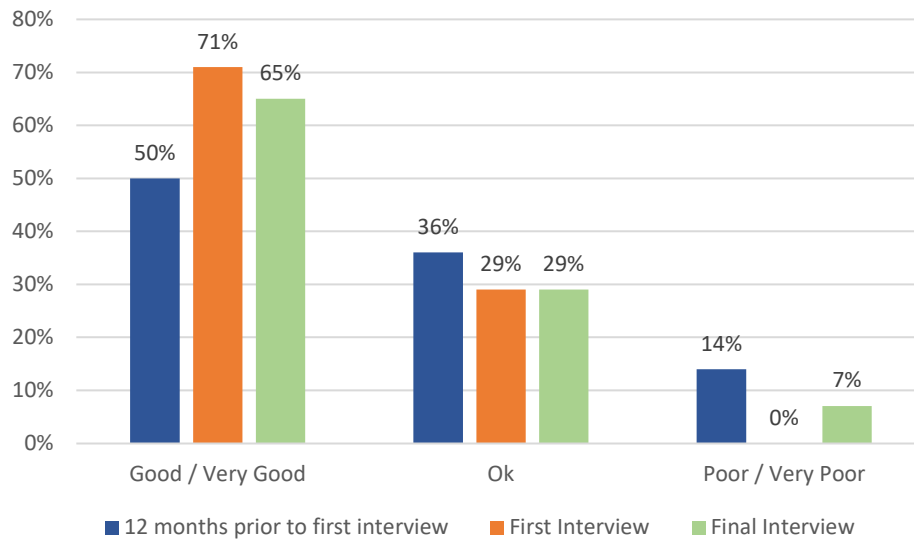
7.2 Mental Health

KEY DATA – Mental Health

- Following an increase in positive mental health ratings at the time of first interview compared to 12 months prior, there followed a slight decrease at the time of final interview. ('Good' or 'very good' mental health ratings increased from 50% at 12 months prior to first interview to 71% at first interview, then decreased to 65% at final interview).
- In all, three participants (21%) rated their mental health lower at the time of final interview compared to first interview. (Reasons included work-related stress, accommodation issues and illness, and missing the routine of work while on sick leave).
- Many participants' mental health was boosted through working, seen particularly through increased confidence and self-esteem. Indicators of confidence increased by almost 20% from first to final interview.
- Work is a welcome refuge for some, where the mind is occupied and thoughts are focused.
- A number of participants spoke about how lack of work in fact negatively impacted their mental health, indicating in a reverse manner the mental health benefits of working. (One participant was missing his work, colleagues and routine while on sick leave; another spoke about her frustration with the lack of purpose and routine in her life when unemployed, while a third spoke about also feeling frustration when his work load decreased).
- Mental health is of course influenced by all areas of life. Securing housing for example, brought a lift to mental health, as did improvements in social health such as improved family relationship and the development of activities and friendships. Conversely, relationship and housing difficulties could challenge mental health.
- Factors contributing to high mental health ratings (rated 'good' or 'very good') at final interview included:
 1. Employment in work that one enjoys
 2. Stable and secure housing
 3. Satisfaction with one's efforts
 4. Resilience
 5. Change in outlook.
- Factors contributing to low mental health ratings (rated 'ok', 'poor' or 'very poor') at final interview included:
 1. Work-related stress
 2. Illness and missing the routine of work while on sick leave
 3. Lack of purpose (in unemployment and employment)
 4. Harassment at accommodation
 5. Relationship difficulties / family separation
- For participants in this research, the main mental health benefits of working are identified as:
 1. Increased confidence and self-esteem (brought about through feeling valued and wanted, useful and purposeful, changed identity and outlook, and new-found independence).
 2. Meaningful use of time (the mind is kept occupied through occupation, structure and routine).

Mental Health Ratings:

Figure 7-3 Change in mental health ratings over three time points among 14 participants.



Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, 50% rated their mental health as 'good' or 'very good' over the 12 months prior to first interview; this increased to 71% at first interview but reduced slightly to 65% at final interview.

Conversely, 50% of participants rated their mental health as 'ok' or 'poor' / 'very poor' over the 12 months prior to first interview; this decreased to 29% at first interview and increased slightly, to 36%, at final interview.

65% (n.9) rated their mental health as 'good' / 'very good' at final interview:

Factors contributing to high mental health ratings ('good' or 'very good') included:

- work that participants enjoy
- stable and secure housing
- satisfaction with one's efforts
- resilience
- change in outlook.

Cedric, for example, suffered an injury, lost his employment and accommodation and at final interview was battling the difficulties once again of returning to work while staying in emergency accommodation. Yet he was positive because he felt he was progressing:

Very good - I'm satisfied with what I've done, with the effort. Everything is going like I planned. I stop gamble, I back to work, I got a car. I don't have accommodation at the moment, but I'll get it soon. Feeling much better.

Adam succinctly sums up his and his wife's resilience:

We are strong in the head.

35% (n.5) rated their mental health as 'ok' or 'poor' / 'very poor' at final interview:

Factors contributing to low mental health ratings ('ok', 'poor' or 'very poor') included:

- stress at work
- missing the routine of work while on sick leave
- lack of purpose (in unemployment and employment)
- housing difficulties / instability
- relationship difficulties / challenges

Frank is working on a difficult plan of family reunification, made all the more challenging by the lack of affordable housing:

I'm very stressed. Because my family is not with me; I am alone here. That is a very, very big problem because soon, I will be separated two years. My objective, my target, is to have the family together. But I must resolve very big issues like accommodation.

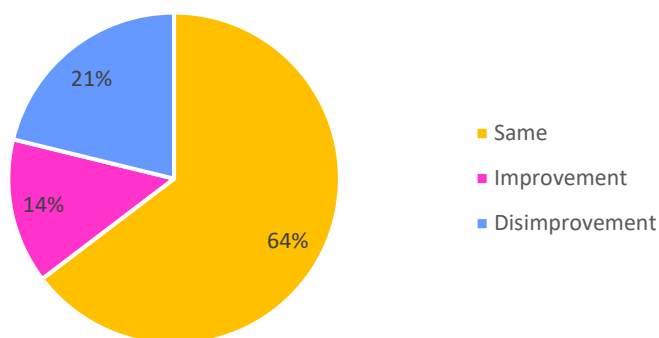
Following promotion at work, Gabriel felt proud of his progress but was experiencing stress adapting to his new role. His mental health rating changed from 'very good' at first interview to 'ok' at final interview. He also indicated stress was leading to an increase in his alcohol use.

Here I have to keep a straight face, a smiling face, to customers, to everybody. Then when I go home it's like everything that's been building up inside, you know, I have to release it. Maybe it's me just adjusting to new challenges, to new responsibilities; maybe it's like this overall, once you get to a different position other than just the general operative. I'd say that's it. I try to deal with it.

Leon's decrease in mental health rating from 'good' to 'ok' was primarily related to harassment at his accommodation and his inability to find suitable alternative accommodation. *Being in that horrible situation – my housing. Problems for so long time made me very exhausted.* His decrease in mental health rating was also related to agitation caused by lack of challenge at work which clashed with his work ethic.

Improvements and Dis-improvements in Mental Health

Figure 7-4 Changes in mental health from first to final interview.



- 21% (n.3) of participants experienced a dis-improvement in their mental health from first to final interview.
- 14% (n.2) experienced an improvement.
- 64% (n.9) of participants' mental health ratings remained at the same point.

Reasons for dis-improved mental health

21% - three participants - reported a dis-improvement in their mental health. They all moved from rating their mental health as 'good' or 'very good' at first interview to rating it as 'ok' or 'poor' at final interview. Harassment at one participant's accommodation, illness and missing the routine of work, stress at work (all detailed above) were contributory factors.

Reasons for improved mental health

14% - two participants - reported an improvement in their mental health at final interview compared to first interview. Both moved from rating their mental health as 'ok' at first interview to 'very good' at final interview. Both credited a change in mind-set as the reason for their improved mental health, brought about for one through work that he enjoys and for the other participant, no longer in employment at final interview, through voluntary work and friendship.

7.2.1 *Work as a sanctuary*

Work is a sanctuary, and at times a refuge, for some participants - a place where they are distracted from their thoughts, their worries, their loneliness.

In some cases, participants throw themselves into work as a short-term coping mechanism during emotionally intense times. In other cases, treating work as a refuge from life is a more long-term coping strategy. In these cases, there appears to be an undercurrent of lives on the edge, of just coping, where work is used as a mechanism to keep unwelcome thoughts at bay.

For Leon, work is a refuge from his stressful housing situation:

At work, I feel better than at home.

For Cedric, working distracts from and fills the void of not having friends or family:

I can't feel lonely at work because I'm thinking about work when I'm working. More in life - I always feel lonely because I don't have friends... I had a couple friends that I tried to trust but when someone's trying only to use you...

While working through emotions following a bereavement, James temporarily found welcome respite in work:

I was losing myself in work. In a sort of a therapeutic way, I suppose. Threw myself into the work anyway.

Andy and David both wanted more hours at work, so as to escape their thoughts.

While separated from his family, Andy sought to use work as a distraction from, or a means of avoiding, his thoughts:

The hours I'm working with this crowd now - I don't like them. It's not enough. It's no-where near enough. I told him when I first started working with him that I wanted 12, up to 16 hours a day. Working 45 hours a week - it's not enough, it's not enough. When I go back to [his temporary insecure accommodation], I'm there by myself and all I'm doing is thinking about [family]. I don't want to be thinking. The more work I do, my mind's focused on that and that alone. When I go back to [his temporary insecure accommodation], I shower, shave, get dressed for bed. But then I'm thinking. It's that thinking part that I don't wanna be doing. Work keeps my mind occupied in a big massive way. I don't wanna think of what is happening.

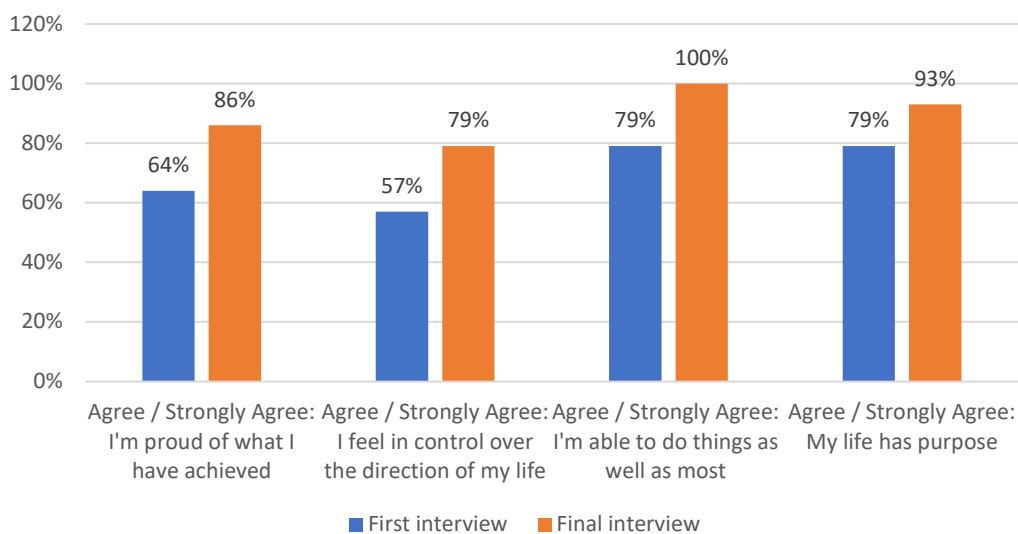
For David, work is a routine form of distraction from his thoughts:

I actually wanted more time. Just, when you're working, you not thinking, about life. Just working. It's like escape. There's no time to think. Same as drinking, you just escaping.

However, both Andy and David reported work related physical strain and David reported work-related injury. There is a risk in working extra hours of pushing the body too hard.

7.2.2 Confidence and self-worth

Figure 7-5 Agreement with statements relating to confidence and self-worth at first and at final interview among 14 participants.



Participants were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with the above statements on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree at first interview and at final interview.

Among the 14 participants with whom contact was maintained, the average rate of agreement (agree or strongly agree) across the four statements increased by almost 20%, from 70% at first interview to 89.5% at final interview, even among those unemployed at final interview.

The statement with the highest level of agreement at final interview was: 'I'm able to do things as well as most' with 100% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

The statement with the lowest level of agreement at final interview was: 'I feel in control over the direction of my life' with 79% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

Identifying personal strengths

Over a third of participants with whom contact was maintained - or half of participants in employment at final interview – identified personal strengths while discussing their work, indicating growing confidence and self-esteem.

Adam, for example, identified he's a "*good worker*". Frank happily declared he's "*very good*" at the data analysis he is studying. Andy recognised he's a particularly hard worker. Jakub could identify his strong inter-personal skills:

I'm good with people, even the crankiest people, because some customers could be dodgy and complaining about everything. I never heard anything from them. I know I'm doing good job. And they know I'm good with the people.

7.3 Social Health

KEY DATA – Social Health

- Connections, both emotional and physical, to the time when homeless, can be uncomfortable for participants. They can also spark compassion and gratitude.
- A significant majority of participants have positive relationships with colleagues with examples of friendships and social activities developing through work. The significant majority also have positive, productive relationships with managers.
- Positive relationships with colleagues and managers indicates awareness of appropriate work-place behaviours.
- Family is an emotive issue for over a third of participants. This is evident in a strong drive to provide for family, to be a positive role model for their children and in the emotional pain of family separation or conflict. Some participants also experienced the challenge of balancing family and work responsibilities.
- Loneliness, and sometimes isolation, are issues for a number of participants at different points in the research.
- A move from survival to living is reflected in the development of activities and in participants' evolving and progressing goals.

Social health, along with physical and mental health, forms one of the three pillars of most definitions of health. As early as 1947, the WHO included 'Social Health' in its definition of overall health.

Social health involves a person's ability to form satisfying interpersonal relationships with others. It also relates to a person's sense of meaning and belonging and their ability to adapt comfortably to, and act appropriately in, different social situations. It promotes both emotional and mental health²⁹.

The research finds examples of loneliness and isolation, of uncomfortable encounters and disconnection. There are also examples of the cultivation and deepening of meaningful relationships, the development of social skills and the development of roles and identities.

The interplay between work and social health:

- Work provides an opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and to feel a part of society – an opportunity which many participants take and develop.
- Work gives some participants the confidence to develop roles and identities, such as parenting related roles and identities.
- Work provides the resources to deepen family relationships.

²⁹ <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-social-health-definition-examples.html#:~:text=Lesson%20Summary-,Social%20health%20involves%20your%20ability%20to%20form%20satisfying%20interpersonal%20relationships,threats%20to%20a%20healthy%20relationship.>

- Work provides an opportunity to develop inter-personal skills.
- Work gives a sense of purpose.

7.3.1 Connections to times past

Cutting ties

Some participants talk about cutting ties or feeling incompatibility with their past acquaintances or social circles.

Steve believes working has helped him to foster a new outlook and identity, from which his view on friendship has changed:

Like even my friends, I changed all that up. I don't have many friends now. I don't hang around with the same crowd. I see the big picture. Them fellas weren't doing me any good like. I knows it myself. If I didn't have nothing for them, they didn't have nothing for me - we weren't friends. I just talk to one or two people now and my girlfriend. Less people, less drama!

For Jakub, life is considerably different now that he is working and in secure housing. He has maintained contact with just one person, who he feels is in a similar position to him, from amongst those he knew when he was homeless.

Like as far as I know, I'm one of the not too many got out from there [emergency accommodation] and be where I am now. There's one guy I'm in touch with, but he moved out and he's working and stuff, so I'll be in touch with him but not with many others, no. So, from the two years I spent in Cork, there's probably one guy I'll be in touch with.

Uncomfortable encounters

Many participants have disassociated from their past and from homelessness, and if 'life now' and 'life then' connect, it can be disconcerting.

Jakub: You meet people sometimes and trying to be aloof from that, d'you know? Sometimes you bump into people, you know, and you good like, and you hear something like *Marcus is dead like, the guy I used to go the gym with, and younger, and it could have been me like, d'you know? I wasn't that bad, you know. But you just can't believe it. It takes you back again. It's horrible. Good guys. (*name changed).

Leon: Yes, I can meet shelter residents when I am out with my children and they can be noisy and messy. There is a large population in the shelter – still in a very bad situation. Life is not fair. Not comfortable to meet guys year after year. I see the system doesn't work. I would rather be in prison than in the shelter.

Emotional connections

A number of participants indicate their experiences of homelessness remain with them, sometimes influencing their perspective.

Jakub speaks about the residual trauma of homelessness:

It's just, Simon is still in my head, you know. The things I've seen, most of it, you can't get rid of it. It'll always be there probably.

Having experienced homelessness with stays in emergency accommodation and on the streets, Steve appreciates what his life now holds – most notably, secure employment and positive relationships. He still does not have secure accommodation, but his past experiences fill him with gratitude for the positives his life now holds.

I am where I wanted to be, like. I never thought I'd be really... well, for some parts of my life, I'm happy like. I'm just happy out with what I have. I know a lot of people don't have it, so I'm more than grateful for what I have, d'you know what I mean?

For Katherine, independent housing brought relief and also compassion for those less fortunate:

Because I had come from the homeless services and I managed to get my own place, I was thinking then about the other people and the friends I made there, and I was saying 'sure God love them, they were still outside the door'.

7.3.2 Relationships at work

Relations with colleagues

For the vast majority, work brings positive relationships and often friendships with colleagues. Many participants light up when they talk about the positive rapport they enjoy with colleagues. Relationships with colleagues were most commonly identified by participants at follow-up interviews as the 'best part' of work.

For some such as Jakub, social activities outside of work have developed from these positive relationships:

The guys in work, they a big part of it. There's a guy Tom*, he's kinda like one of my best friends now. If we're working together, I really looking forward to it. The other guy, Derek*, we go bowling very often. (*names changed)

Steve is enjoying the experience of getting along with colleagues, having clashed with colleagues and managers in previous jobs. In his final interview he talked about a change in outlook; a maturing. He now values the positive relations he has built with colleagues:

I feel myself that I want to go in there. I enjoy my job, like you know. I actually get along with people! I gets on with everyone. I don't look for drama. I go in and do my job; it's hard enough as it is, so I don't need to be arguing with people or having drama. So yeah, I gets on with everyone I'd say.

A small minority had words of complaint about relations in their workplace. One participant found her colleagues "clicky" and hard to develop a rapport with while another found his level of English posed a challenge to developing relationships at work.

Relations with managers

The vast majority of participants report good relations with their managers.

Frank's description of his relationship with his manager is typical of the participant group:

Good. It's a work relationship. No problems. He doesn't disturb me; I don't disturb him. When I make a question for holidays, they never make a problem. You can talk with the people, no problem.

A number of participants indicate particularly positive relations with their managers, which they value and appreciate.

James appreciated the support he received from his manager and colleagues following an illness and a stay in hospital:

We get on great. In fact, I was only speaking to him [his manager] yesterday. Very approachable. And the same with the actual owner of the company. Oh, they're always ringing me. Nearly every day I get a phone call from one or the other. In fact, once they heard what was after happening to me, he was the first to say, 'Take as much time as you need, don't come back until you're 100%'. Me getting this illness has proven the support I do get from my colleagues, as well as the boss.

Jakub values the collaborative way in which he and his manager work:

He's my boss, but he's my friend as well. I can go to him with any problems I have, you know. I trust him and he trusts me. He'll be talking to me, I'll be giving him ideas, he'll be giving me ideas. I'm totally supported [in work].

Two participants experienced incompatibility with their manager's style of management. One participant accepts the difference and is progressing well. The other participant felt compelled to step back from his promotion to Team Leader and return to the role of General Operative so as to avoid conflict with his manager in the interests of maintaining his employment.

7.3.3 Relationships with family

Family is an emotive subject for over a third of participants. This is evident in a strong drive to provide for family, to be a positive role model for their children, and in the emotional pain of family separation or conflict. Some participants also talk about the challenge of balancing family and work responsibilities.

Roles & responsibilities

One participant, soon to become a father, sees his parental role as that of provider and it is a role he adopts whole heartedly:

We find out my partner is pregnant and d'you know, being the man, you have to provide. That's exactly what I'm trying to do. Have that feeling of a family around you, to be able to provide for that family.

Leon believes a parent should be a positive role model for their children. He believes he achieves this through employment, and this has boosted his confidence and self-esteem.

Biggest benefit is I am a role model; I have kids. I am part of society. It is difficult to be that when you are unemployed; I am ashamed and uncomfortable. This is a huge step from where I was, and I am moving in the proper direction. I am contributing to society.

I feel much better for them [his kids] – I give them much more proper example of life looks – free time, work time. What is your father doing? Can you imagine how difficult no answer would be for them? Any kid proud of parent – parents - it doesn't matter what kind of work. It's built my self-esteem.

Re-establishing contact with family

Two participants spoke about their feelings of shame in connection with their family when homeless and unemployed. But work and housing have positively influenced their self-image. Leon, in his quote above, refers to this. In Jakub's case, detailed below, employment and independent housing gave him the confidence to re-establish contact with his family:

I didn't have contact with [my family] and I didn't see them for like four years. I didn't want to talk with her [his mum] because it was embarrassing, like you know, if she ask me, 'where you live' or 'what you doing?' - 'I live in homeless shelter, I do nothing', d'you know. She probably wouldn't believe it. When I moved in here [social housing], it was when my Grandfather died, so I got in touch with my mum again. And I got my sister back as well and my niece - she's big now but when I looked at her after four years I was just crying like, I couldn't believe it, you know... my mum, my sister... it's all back. My sister, she'll be worrying a lot about everything but then when she knows I'm good now, she's happier, you know, I'm happier. It's massive difference. (**name changed*)

Balancing work and family life

Two participants were faced with the challenge of balancing work and family life.

Providing for his family is important to Andy and motivates him to work (as described above in 'Roles and Responsibilities'). However, work also takes him away from his partner and daughter. Andy describes the emotional challenge of this when he and his family were separated due to work and housing arrangements for a time:

It was hard. There were some nights I'd cry myself to sleep. [But] Everything would change as soon as I'd get back into work; my whole way of thinking would change. But as soon as I got home and I'd see her [his daughter], d'you know, I'm in pieces. I go back and I don't want to let her go. I even tried last week see would she fit in my work bag, but she won't - her head keeps sticking out of it. I miss her terribly. If I start giving [partner and daughter] more time, I'm gonna lose my job which is supporting me and it's trying to explain that to [his partner].

Family distress

A number of participants experienced stress and anguish related to family conflict or separation.

Frank is geographically separated from his family and is missing them. He feels he needs to be in Ireland, where he can work, in order to build a better future for his family. However, he is on a low wage and housing is a considerable obstacle.

I'm very stressed. Because my family is living in [a different country], not with me. I am alone here. That is a very, very big problem because soon, I will be separated two years. Sometimes it's hard. Some days it's hard.

Much has worked out for Jakub – housing, employment, new friendships. But his children are not with him due to separation.

It's like I got my life back, you know, like I had before. The only difference is I don't have the kids with me. It's hard you know sometimes. I go to sleep sometimes and these dreams I have are so real like, d'you know. And I wake up in the morning, I sit out on the edge of the bed and have couple of minutes just to figure out what's going on. Crazy like.

7.3.1 Loneliness

Loneliness, and sometimes isolation, are issues for a number of participants at different points in the research.

Living alone, sick leave from work, family separation and language barriers at work contributed to participants' experiences of loneliness, while living alone and unemployment contributed to one participant's experience of isolation.

As detailed, employment creates new social connections for many and fills the void of not having family or friends for some, counteracting loneliness to some extent.

Loneliness was a running theme throughout David's interviews. He experienced loneliness when living alone and particularly when homeless and staying in a van. He worked any extra hours he could to distract from his loneliness and described how loneliness exacerbates his depression and his alcohol use.

In his final interview, he spoke about the need for support with social re-integration following homelessness:

Mental health is very, very important. Even if somebody go off to prison, or somewhere [and] you get back into society, you don't feel from the start the same. So it needs some period when you need help. It's very hard to get to people about mental health because nobody recognise it for themselves. 'No, I'm ok.' But somebody must be specialist who can recognise it. Not because of questions but look in eyes and you can see straight away.

At final interview, Katherine was unemployed and living alone. While grateful for her secure social housing, she talked about the isolation and decline in mental health she was experiencing in this situation:

I felt way better in myself, I felt like that when I was working. I could listen more to people. Instead of being stuck in the house all day and listening to the same voice or the same carry-on, like deja-vu. Nothing changes like.

7.3.2 Activities

50% of participants (n.7) refer to new activities in their lives subsequent to employment; a reflection that life is developing beyond basic survival and is moving towards the 'normal life' that so many participants aspire to.

Activities include:

- Fishing
- Exercise (gym / weights at home)
- Volunteering
- Socialising with work colleagues
- Going to the cinema
- Education course (outside of work)
- Furnishing a home
- Spending time with children

Many participants squeeze these in, referring to limited time and to being tired after work.

Reflecting on how life has improved, Julia describes her volunteering activities as helping her to feel a part of society.

I do volunteer job as well. I did some volunteering with the homeless but since I work, I have no time for that. By the night, I'm really tired. So I joined [voluntary group] and I teach elderly people how to use the computer. I have a student, so it's nice. It's only three or four hours a week. It's nice - the friends, the people - I'm a part of the society.

Steve describes how his activities, along with his mindset, changed as he settled into his working life: Now: gym and cinema. Before: off my head, off my head, off my head. I rarely, literally, have time for myself. Work, home, food, shower, bed. I might get an old hour or two of Netflix. I'm just wrecked anyhow most of the time. Go to the gym alright. That's it.

David takes a different view to activities, reflecting loneliness and isolation. He works as many hours as are available, intentionally leaving no time for the option of activities:

I have no activities. I too tired come back. Even Saturday or Sunday - go landscaping for boss, working for cash. See if you have nobody spend time with, what activity?

8 PROBLEMATIC ALCOHOL/DRUG/GAMBLING USE

KEY DATA – Problematic Use

- By final interview, 79% (n.11) were managing their alcohol, drug or gambling use; 21% (n.3) indicated problematic use (one of whom was in employment).
- 50% (n.7) experienced problematic use at some point during the research. By final interview, most of them were managing their use or had quit; some experienced intermittent problematic use throughout the research and one experienced emerging problematic use towards the end of the research.
- Six of the seven participants who experienced problematic use during the research credited employment with helping them to manage their use. The one remaining participant experienced emerging problematic use at final interview due to work stress.
- By providing occupation and routine, employment helps participants manage their mental health and in turn their use of alcohol, drugs or gambling. An appreciation of, and an aversion to losing, the benefits of employment also motivate participants to ‘stay the course’.
- There is also evidence of accommodation influencing problematic use with accounts of independent housing helping participants to manage their problematic use and accounts of stays in emergency accommodation and experiences of rough sleeping exacerbating or re-igniting problematic use.

At final interview, 79% (n.11) of participants were managing their alcohol, drug or gambling use:

- 21% reported no problematic use³⁰
- 29% remained in recovery from alcohol³¹.
- 29% had experienced a period of problematic use at some point during the research but by final interview were managing their use and were in employment³².

By final interview, the remaining 21% (n.3) of participants indicated problematic alcohol or drug use:

- 7% reported an increase in alcohol use associated with increased work stress.
- 14% experienced intermittent problematic alcohol and drug use before and during the research.³²

³⁰ They rated the negative impact of alcohol in their lives as 0 or 1, on a scale of 1 to 10, both in the 12 months before returning work and at follow-up interviews. They rated the native impact of drugs and gambling as 0.

³¹ They rated the negative impact of alcohol as 10 out 10, on a scale of 1 to 10, in the 12 months prior to starting work but had stopped using alcohol before starting work and continued to abstain through-out the research.

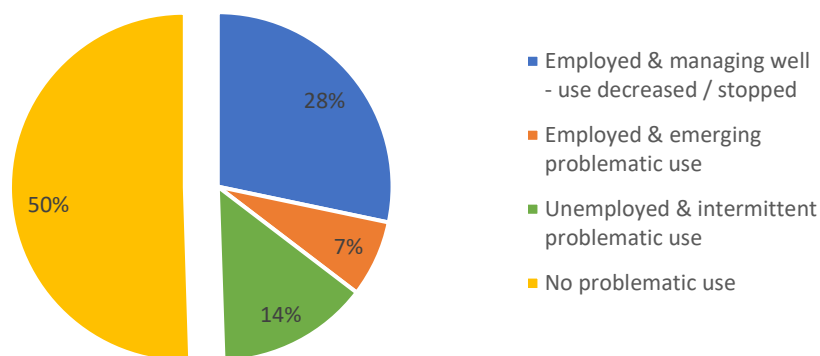
³² A period of problematic use is identified through participants accounts of the impact or consequences of alcohol, drugs or gambling in their lives. It is also reflected in their self-assessments at each interview, using a scale of 1 to 10 to gauge the negative impact of alcohol, drugs or gambling in their lives.

8.1 Periods of problematic use

50% (n. 7) of participants reported problematic use³² at some point in the research. A period of problematic alcohol use affected six participants and a return to gambling affected one participant.

By final interview, most participants who had experienced problematic use were managing their use of alcohol or gambling by decreasing or stopping their use (indicated by 28% (n.4) blue section in pie chart below); some were experiencing persistent problematic use (indicated by the green sections in pie chart below) and one was experiencing emerging problematic use (indicated by orange section).

Figure 8-1 Problematic use and employment at final interview.



Factors contributing to problematic use were complex in most cases; rarely did just one factor contribute and factors influenced and compound one another. Such factors included staying in emergency accommodation, unemployment, relationship difficulties, grief, depression, loneliness and work stress.

Five of the seven participants who experienced a period of problematic use were staying in emergency accommodation or sleeping rough (in a van) at the time.

Six of the seven participants who experienced a period of problematic use credit employment with helping them to manage their use. The one participant who didn't, reported work stress to have exacerbated his alcohol use.

James talked about grief leading to increased alcohol use for a period of time. He was unemployed at the time but subsequently started work and credits it with helping him to fill his time and manage his alcohol use.

There was a lot of emotions, put it that way. So, that's when I started hitting the bottle a bit. I was just trying to cover sadness. That was worrying that I was using drink as a bit of a crutch. I suppose I was getting into a sort of a rut, using too much alcohol and just being negative. So, I made a decision – look, get rid of the alcohol and things have... my mind has changed now, it's all positive. Looking forward to work now. I'm hardly drinking at all. New job. Just looking forward to life.

Relationship difficulties and staying in emergency accommodation contributed to problematic alcohol use at the start of the research for Scott, which cost him his job. By final interview he was in employment, living independently and feeling positive. He credits employment, and independent housing in particular, with helping him to manage his use.

Every time I had a fight with them [wife and family] I was kinda drinking after that, you know and I was missing the days at work. My mind was absolutely somewhere else. I couldn't gather myself together to be where I am now, you know. I dunno. It was making me happy. And I could go to sleep. But I lost the job twice because of it – drinking. But then when I got this place here, nothing like this happened. And I live on my own. I have all the money in the world. I could drink. I just figured there was something wrong in my head, you know, in these places.

David, who experienced intermittent dual problematic use during the research indicates the complexity of issues behind his alcohol use:

It's not one thing, you know. It's never one thing, you know. It's like, loneliness, that, that, that, come together and it's like, puff.

You're feeling lonely or feeling unhappy, it makes stronger you know... drinking. When you drinking you go to sleep, but when you wake up, it's still the same, so it's pointless. And you're getting worse of course. You're psychologically getting worse, you know. Not because the hangover, but nothing change. You wake up and still nothing change. So of course, it's affecting. It's really not [the] issue you know, it's not the main issue.

Problematic use contributing to job loss:

Problem alcohol use directly contributed to one participant (Scott – detailed above) losing employment. This participant went on to secure further work and by final interview was employed over six months in a job he enjoyed and was progressing well in. He credits independent housing and employment with helping him to manage his alcohol use.

Problem alcohol or drug use may have contributed, alongside other factors, to two other participants being unable to maintain work during the research period.

8.2 Working and housing help manage problematic use

Working helps manage problematic use

50% (n.7) of participants said working helped them to manage their use of alcohol, drugs or gambling.

Those who it helped, it helped significantly. Among the seven participants who said that working helped them to manage their use, close to three quarters (71% / n.5) rated the positive impact of work in helping them to manage their use as 10 out of 10, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 representing maximum positive effect.

The following factors were associated with work helping participants to manage their use:

1. Work provides meaningful use of time thereby keeping the mind occupied / focused.

2. Work provides structure and/or routine to the day and to the week.
3. Appreciation of, and an aversion to losing, the benefits of employment.

Overall, work helps participants to manage their mental health, which in turns helps them to manage their use of alcohol, drugs or gambling.

Katherine reflects on how enjoyment of her job and the structure that work gave her helped her to manage her alcohol use:

It stopped me from drinking. It basically did like. I think, because I looked forward to going in to the job, that I didn't want to be f**king anything up so I was saying what's the point of going drinking when you could go away for the weekend or go somewhere different in the county for the day or go to the pictures or anything besides sitting down having a drink. When you think about it, the weekend is only one day - Saturday. Because you've to get ready Sunday then if you're going to work. Then you're back Monday to Friday doing the same thing. So it's kinda like a routine so.

Katherine also emphasises a general link between occupation and positive mental health and a more specific link between meaningful use of time and managing problematic use for people who are homeless:

I think working is great for your head. I think everybody should at least have the opportunity. Either voluntary, or something they like doing, or get themselves doing something, because you have to keep the brain going. In two seconds, the brain could turn around and say 'sure I'm not doing nothin'; you might as well go out there and get a joint or a fag or a drink or do something. And it's only a second thought. That's all it is. Work is very good for mental health. How people do it like [survive homelessness], every day, day in day out, with nothing to do? And their only thought is to get drink or drugs but at the back of their mind then they know they're doing wrong, but 'I just do it cause I've nothing to do', which is what most people will say to ya, like. It's crazy.

Andy consciously used work as a means to occupy his mind and manage his mental health, helping him to remain in recovery:

Why I did so many hours was to keep my mind focused on something else, instead of feeling depressed and sick of everything, and then I'd pick up a drink. I haven't got to even look at a pub or look at anybody that's drinking. My time is just focused into work. 11 and a half out of 10!

Housing

There are a number of references through-out the research of participants experiencing an improvement in their ability to manage their alcohol use when in independent housing. There are also references to the often chaotic and stressful environment of emergency accommodation exacerbating problematic use.

On page 80 Jakub describes how independent housing has helped him to manage his alcohol use. While on page 56 Katherine describes how a return to emergency accommodation negatively impacted her mental health and contributed to a return to problematic alcohol use.

9 FINANCES

KEY DATA – Finances

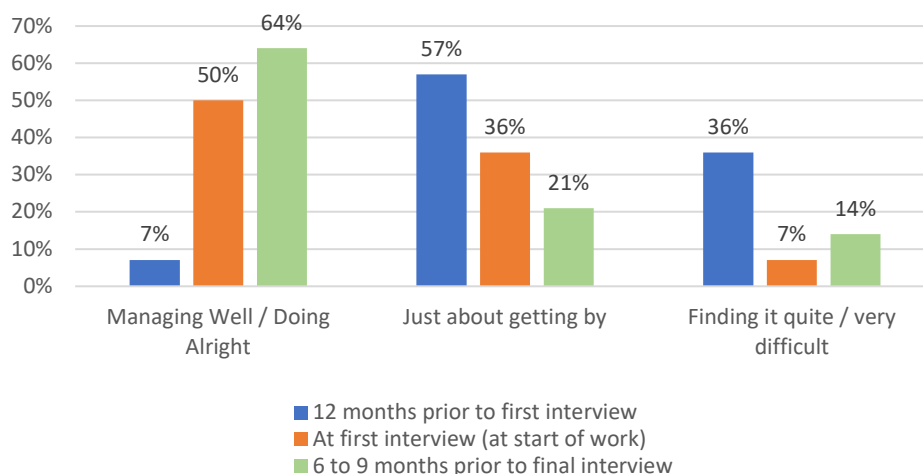
- Finances improved for the majority of participants as the research continued.
- The percentage of participants reporting they were ‘managing well’ or ‘doing alright’ improved over the course of the research from 7% in the 12 months prior to starting work, to 50% at the time of starting work, to 64% in the 6 – 9 months prior to final interview.
- However, by final interview, a significant third of participants reported they were still struggling financially (they were ‘just about getting by’ or ‘finding it quite difficult’).
- Three out of the above five participants reporting financial difficulty at final interview were in employment and were planning to change jobs for financial reasons; two were in receipt of unemployment benefit.

Money in itself is not a motivator for participants when returning to work; money is of value for the difference it could make to participants lives, as detailed in Report 1, The Early Days. Two employees also commented on how they would favour a positive work environment over finances. However, work must make financial sense for participants to persevere.

One participant lost his motivation for work when his company could no longer afford over-time, which was propping up his low wage. This decrease in finances, alongside personal factors, led to his resignation. Another participant stepped back from a promotion to Team Leader and recommenced his previous role of General Operative when difficulties arose with his manager. He felt the small pay increase when promoted did not warrant the stress and difficulty of working directly with his manager.

Finances did, however, improve for the majority during the course of the research. But a significant third were struggling financially at final interview.

Figure 9-1 Grouped self-rated finances at three time points, among 14 participants.



The percentage of participants reporting they were ‘managing well’ or ‘doing alright’ improved over the course of the research from 7% in the 12 months prior to starting work, to 50% at the time of starting work, to 64% in the 6 – 9 months prior to final interview.

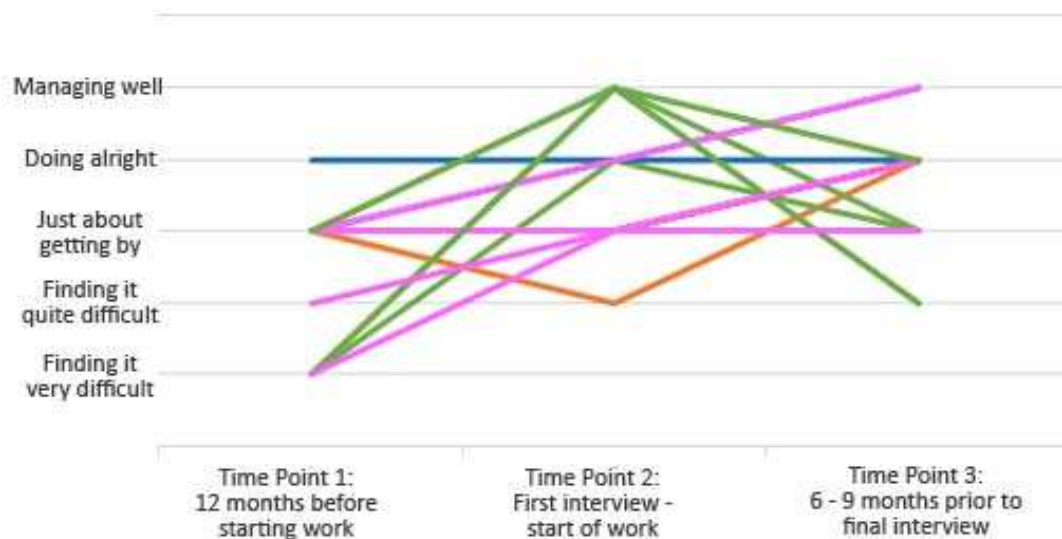
Yet still, by final interview, 21% reported they were ‘just about getting by’ and 14% reported that they were ‘finding it quite difficult’ in the 6 – 9 months prior to last interview – combined, 35% were struggling financially. Among this group of five participants, three were in employment at the time of final interview and were planning to change jobs for financial reasons.

Reasons for financial difficulty among this 35% at final interview included:

- Family to support, low income and work hours that fluctuated with the season (two participants)
- Reliance on social welfare (two participants)
- Low income and debts and bills to pay (one participant)

Overall, an upward trend is seen in finances, with some fluctuations, as the research period progressed, as seen in the graph below.

Figure 9-2 Tracking changes in finances across three time points among 14 participants.



<p>■ Finances consistently improved</p> <p>■ Finances remained the same</p> <p>■ Finances improved and then dis-improved</p> <p>■ Finances dis-improved and then improved</p>	<p>50% - 7 participants</p> <p>7% - 1 participant</p> <p>35% - 5 participants</p> <p>7% - 1 participant</p>
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Ratings of finances improved steadily over the course of the research for 50% of participants and for 7% they remained the same. The remaining 43% of participants experienced fluctuations with 7% experiencing a dis-improvement followed by an improvement and 36% experiencing an improvement followed by a dis-improvement.

Reasons for dis-improvements in finances included loss of employment and reliance on Social Welfare or Illness Benefit, as experienced by two participants; an increase in debts associated with injury and a return to gambling, as experienced by one participant; the reason was unclear in two cases – the decrease in one participant's case was minimal and in the other participant's case it may have been associated with a low income and an increase in family expenses.

Adam describes the difference employment has made to his finances and thus his life:

Difference is I have enough money for all my needs - for rent, I have money for car, I have money for journey, I have money for everything that I need. Right now, I can say easy life, from before. I feel lucky. I have normal life. This is difference from before I guess. Right now: happy!

Debts / Arrears

Eight participants had debts or arrears as they started work. This reduced to three participants at final interview. One participant carried the same debt from the time he started work. Two participants acquired new debts – both were accommodation arrears, one to a private landlord and one to a homeless shelter.

10 EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING TEAM ENGAGEMENT

A core aim of the Employment and Training Programme is to support service users in establishing sustainable routes out of homelessness through employment. Through this process, many no longer need the support of the programme as they progress to independent living. However, the philosophy of the Employment and Training Programme and that of Cork Simon is to support people for as long as they need, with supports tailored to the unique needs of the individual.

At the time of final interview, a significant majority of participants (86% n.12) were still in touch with the Employment and Training Team on an ad hoc basis. Just two participants were no longer in contact with the team.

Supports from the Employment and Training Team from the time participants started work included:

- Support to three participants in securing new jobs
- Organising training for five participants
- Negotiating with two employers on employee's behalf
- Individual, tailored support to three of the four participants who were unemployed at final interview.

Participants have positive relationships with the Employment and Training Team, find them approachable and constructive, and trust them.

I can't say enough about them, they have been fantastic to me.

There is an understanding among participants that they can contact and receive support from the Employment and Training Team at any time.

As James said, the message he received was: *'Call in any time at all. If I ever have any issues - pick up the phone - no problem'*.

This helped him to feel supported: *It's great, because I do know if I ever have a serious, serious issue I can always talk to [Employment and Training staff].*

Jakub keeps in touch with the Employment and Training Co-Ordinator and relies on the team for training or certification needs:

I ring her and I said, 'look, I need a MEWP [Mobile Elevation Working Platforms] course and she got that for me in two weeks. And I did Safe Pass before. And I'll be needing Manual Handling when it expires, so I'll probably ring her. I like her a lot.

11 ADVICE FROM PARTICIPANTS

The two most common pieces of advice from participants are to not give up and to avail of supports offered by the Employment and Training Team.

Don't give up

The early days are identified as the hardest; both body and mind are adjusting to the transition to employment. Participants urge that it does get better, and not to give up, but to give it time.

Cedric: It's quite difficult... once you make a break for a long time and you're back to work... even physically it's difficult to get back to work, and mentally as well. Once you get it back, you'll be alright. Not to give up, I would say.

James: The advice I would make, no matter how bad you think things are, don't give up, don't give up. It's going to be very hard, but it will get better. Grin and bear it and try and get on with things and eventually something will happen for the better, if you want it. Just give it a bit of time.

Avail of supports offered by the Employment and Training Team

The Employment and Training Team are praised by participants throughout the research for their dedication and support towards service users.

Ask them for all and any help that you need, and they will provide it.

Don't be scared. Here is very good team for help. Fiona and team will really try to find a way to help you.

Beneficial characteristics and mindsets

Confidence, responsibility and commitment, you know. It is very important.

Be open-minded and be positive. And you have to be flexible.

If you want something really badly like, get it like. It just all depends really on how badly you want it to be honest. If you want something, you have to give it 110% - only 50% is not gonna work for you.

Advice specific to surviving and progressing on a building site

If people want to work on a building site, they're gonna have to put up with people who are cranky and abusive and everything like that on site. And if the person can't handle that and they end up flipping... d'you, a building site's not good for them. But my advice to them, would be to ignore it and walk away. You still have the rest of your life to live for. Just keep putting as much effort, as much strength as you possibly can into your job and focus on everything. It is absolutely beyond belief what sort of network of people you get to meet while on a building site - if you could start up a conversation. Don't be shy around people on a building site because it just doesn't go - people won't remember who you are then.

Look after your mental health

Advice regards looking after your mental health includes staying in employment, seeing a doctor when necessary, finding someone to talk to and persevering. One participant also indicates the need for support workers to be trained and alert to mental health issues.

Cedric: If you have mental health problem, go see a doctor. Keep yourself going. Be fit for something.

Jakub: Keep working. Keep your mind occupied. Keep the job going.

David: Mental health is very, very important. Even if somebody go off to prison, or somewhere - you get back into society, you don't feel from the start the same. So, it needs some period when you need help. It's very hard to get to people about mental health because nobody recognise it for themselves. 'No, I'm ok.' But somebody must be specialist who can recognise it. Not because of questions, but look in eyes and you can see straight away.

Choosing work

Advice about choosing work ranges from exercising caution to seizing opportunities. One participant emphasises the importance of finding work one enjoys.

Think about everything. Weigh up the situation before you jump into it, because I think when you jump into something, it don't end good like. Do everything for yourself and don't jump into any decisions.

You must take the opportunities.

People definitely need to find a job that they like. There's no point going to work and hating your job. If you said to me, I have to sit behind this counter and talk to people and take calls, I would cry. If you have a job that you like and you enjoy and you go to work with a smile on your face, that's the main thing, I think.

Small steps

Participants advise that change can take time and small steps are best.

Slowly build. You'll get there in the end. Slowly but surely.

There's work out there. There is a better life out there. But it's going to take time. It takes time.

One participant suggests some people may be better suited initially to part-time hours, in light of the physical and mental strain of starting work. This participant also highlights a connection between physical fatigue and mental strain.

Imagine somebody sit in the Simon for a year and a half or something and they start work. They not ready to work most of them. Physically, you're not ready. When you physically not ready, you get tired, so your mental health go down as well, you know what I mean? So I think, maybe it's better, some people - not all, some people who is long term homeless - some work - step by step - not full time, because some not capable to work full time.

Surviving in an Emergency Shelter

One participant, reflecting on his experience of working and staying in an emergency shelter advises taking life 'one day at a time' when in such circumstances, in order to survive.

It's not a healthy place to be, especially when you're trying to work and get on with things. Take it one day at a time really. That place is one day at a time, because it is a lot to take in. Worry about this, worry about that, you know... am I gonna get a bed tonight? Just take it one day at a time. Take everything as it comes, the good and the bad, because that's the only way you will survive in there anyway, if you ask me. I think when you're in places like that, in prison, in treatment centres, all that, just take everything one day at a time because it's not easy. Think about yourself and where you want to be and eventually you will get there.

Managing Money

Most important – know how to manage your money. Buy what you need and keep savings. You never know when you'll need it.

Keep Learning

It's very important to do courses, any kind of course because it will be useful... you can never know. It doesn't matter how old are you or whatever. You have to learn new things.

12 APPENDIX

12.1 Covid19 Update

Introduction

The Covid19 pandemic reached the Republic of Ireland on 29 February 2020 and within two weeks unprecedented steps were taken by the Government to control the spread of the virus; from 12 March, a range of restrictions, or lockdown measures were introduced which shut schools and colleges, businesses and banned all non-essential travel and contact. The effects of the pandemic have impacted all our lives and have caused a severe recession and an unprecedented rise in unemployment in Ireland.

The Government introduced temporary emergency measures at the end of March, for an initial 12-week period (from 27 March to 27 June 2020), to alleviate the economic impact of the pandemic. These measures included:

- Housing support through a rent freeze and evictions moratorium³³.
- Employment support through the COVID-19 Pandemic Unemployment Payment (a single rate payment to those made redundant) and through the Temporary Covid19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (which allowed employers economically affected by the pandemic to continue paying their staff)³⁴.

With the decision to postpone the publication of this research paper from March until September 2020 due to the pandemic, the opportunity to assess the impact of the Covid19 on the lives of the research participants presented.

Brief interviews were conducted with available participants between 9 June and 20 July 2020 at which time Ireland was in Phases 2 and 3 of the Government's Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business³⁵.

Interviews focused primarily on employment and housing. The aim of the interviews was:

1. To update on participant's current employment and housing circumstances.
2. To record the impact, if any, of Government restrictions and supports on employment and housing.

Among the 14 participants from Report 2, eight were involved in this 'Covid19 Update' – six were interviewed via telephone and updates on two people's circumstances were provided by a Key Worker. The remaining six people were uncontactable.

³³ This measure was extended twice, ended on 1 August 2020 and was replaced by new, temporary, Covid19 related rental laws. <https://www.citizensinformation.ie>

³⁴ With the ending of the emergency period in June, PUP changed from a single rate payment to one based on previous earnings. The TWSS was extended until 31 August 2020 after which it was replaced with the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme. <https://www.citizensinformation.ie>

³⁵ Government of Ireland (2020). Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business. (PDF file: 73722_ffd17d70fbb64b498fd809dde548f411 (1).pdf)

This additional round of interviews brings the total research contact phase with participants to 41 months, or 3 years and 5 months³⁶ and the total number of interviews to 45.

Results

Key Data

- Four out of eight participants were in employment at the time of interview.
- Six out of eight were in independent housing (private rented or social housing) with one more participant soon to move to independent housing.
- Covid19 restrictions affected two out of a potential three participant's employment temporarily - they were in receipt of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme for up to 6 weeks. (The fourth person, in employment at the time, was in receipt of Illness Benefit before and after the introduction of restrictions).
- None of the participants experienced financial or legal concerns regarding their accommodation since the commencement of Covid19 restrictions.
- Covid19 restrictions have impacted negatively on four people's mental health – all of whom are out of work.
- One participant expressed concern about sustaining her tenancy following an increase in her problematic alcohol use, triggered by isolation during Covid19 restrictions.

Employment and income update:

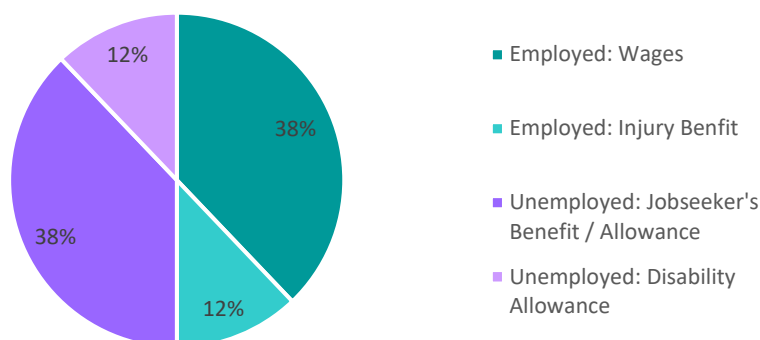
Employment status remained the same since last interview for six of the eight participants. Among the two participants for whom employment status changed since last interview, one gained work while one lost work.

At the time of Covid19 update interview:

- Four of the eight participants were in employment. Three were actively working at the time while one was on leave related to injury.
 - Three of the four participants in employment had progressed to new jobs since last interview while one participant held the same job since the start of the research.
 - Among the three participants in new jobs, one had gained employment after 11 months of unemployment, while the other two participants had progressed positively and directly from one job to another with one individual moving to a job with more responsibility and the other moving to work that better suited his health needs, and was also better paid.
 - Areas of work among the four participants in employment were: construction, non-profit and food retail.
- The remaining four participants were not working at the time of update.
 - One was in receipt of Disability Allowance – she had been in employment at last interview, but health issues had made working unsustainable.
 - The remaining three participants were in receipt of Jobseeker's Benefit / Allowance, as they had been at last interview.

³⁶ First interview took place on 28 February 2017 and the final COVID19 update interview took place on 20 July 2020.

Figure 12-1 Employment at the time of Covid19 Update interview.



The impact of Covid19 restrictions on employment:

Participants were asked about the impacts, if any, of Covid19 on their employment since March 12th.

Three participants were in employment in March 2020 when Covid19 restrictions were introduced while a fourth participant gained work in July 2020.

Two of the three participants in employment in March experienced temporary lay-off for up to six weeks and were in receipt of the Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme. Both were employed in the construction industry. Neither received a top up from their employer but both reported that the scheme covered their outgoings.

Employment and income remained unaffected by Covid19 restrictions for the third participant in employment in March. He was on leave from work and in receipt of Injury Benefit prior to Covid19 restrictions.

Housing update:

Housing remained the same since last interview for six of the eight participants. Among the two participants for whom housing changed, one moved from emergency to temporary supported accommodation³⁷ while the other moved from shared to private emergency accommodation³⁸.

At the time of Covid19 update interview:

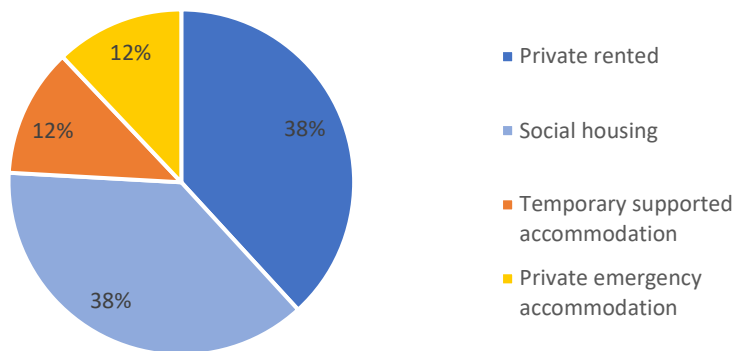
- Three participants were in private rented accommodation and had held this accommodation for between two and three years.
- Three participants were in social housing and had held this accommodation for between two and three years.

³⁷ Offered by Cork Simon.

³⁸ Private emergency accommodation may include hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis.

- One participant was in temporary supported accommodation³⁹ but was about to move to private rented accommodation. He has been in temporary supported or emergency accommodation for 18 months.
- One participant was in private emergency accommodation. He had moved to this accommodation as part of the re-orientation of emergency accommodation services in response to Covid19. He has been in emergency accommodation since before the start of the research.

Figure 12-2 Accommodation at the time of Covid19 Update interview.



The impact of Covid19 restrictions on housing:

Participants were asked about the impacts, if any, of Covid19 on their housing since March 12th.

None experienced financial or legal concerns relating to their housing.

One participant experienced a change of accommodation as part of the reconfiguration of emergency accommodation services in response to Covid19 - he moved from shared to private emergency accommodation and found the move isolating as he was separated from acquaintances.

One participant expressed concern about sustaining her social housing tenancy following an increase in her problematic use of alcohol, triggered by isolation and boredom during Covid19 restrictions.

Isolation, and its impact on mental health, arising from extended time spent in accommodation following Covid19 restrictions, impacted four participants (including the two participants noted immediately above).

General impact of Covid19 on participants.

At the time of update interview, four of the eight participants - three of whom were working - were in positive and/or stable frames of mind. The remaining four participants - none of whom were working - were struggling with mental health, exacerbated by isolation following Covid19 restrictions.

³⁹ Offered by Cork Simon

Positive / Stable

Two participants are particularly positive; both have maintained social housing tenancies and have progressed in their careers, moving seamlessly since last interview to new jobs that they enjoy. Both have remained in employment through-out the research. One participant, who had spoken about the trauma of homelessness - *'It's just, Simon is still in my head, you know... the things I've seen, most of it, you can't get rid of it... it'll always be there probably'* - felt the time was right to address his experiences and had taken a positive step by starting counselling.

One participant is on the cusp of a new and positive chapter in his life; at the time of interview he had secured employment and private rented accommodation, which he would shortly move to, after months in emergency and temporary supported accommodation. His goal remains *'to live a normal life'* – a goal he has held since the start of the research.

Another participant's circumstances are stable, although she has concerns. She has maintained her private rented tenancy for over two years and is currently in receipt of Disability Allowance. She was employed in a job she valued and was progressing well, however deteriorations in her physical health made work unsustainable. She is concerned about losing her work skills and would very much like to secure part-time work, appropriate to her health.

Struggling

In one participant's case, isolation and boredom triggered increased problematic alcohol use which led to concerns for the sustainability of the participant's social housing tenancy.

A support worker reported that another two participants - one of whom lived alone in private rented accommodation while the other had moved from shared to private emergency accommodation and had lost social connections – were feeling isolated and disconnected since the introduction of restrictions and were finding the situation was challenging to their ability to cope.

A fourth participant reported that his mental health has been significantly affected by ongoing harassment at his private rented accommodation. Sick leave from work and Covid19 restrictions led to significantly more time at home which exacerbated the situation. He has been unable to find alternative, affordable accommodation. He doesn't know what the future holds in terms of work or housing; housing is his most pressing concern.