



**MOTIVATIONS, CHALLENGES AND
CHANGE FOR PEOPLE WITH EXPERIENCE
OF HOMELESSNESS WHEN MOVING
INTO EMPLOYMENT**

Cork Simon Community
October 2019



Thank you to the 18 men and women who gave of their time and generously shared their experiences during this research.

- Sophie Johnston,
Cork Simon Community.
October 2019.

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Introduction

Background

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 in Cork.

Many of the people Cork Simon support face multiple barriers to resuming or starting employment. Many have experienced deeply traumatic childhoods¹, institutionalisation, early school leaving² and a distinct lack of opportunity and support throughout their lives. These factors, alongside issues such as poor health, problem alcohol, drug or gambling use³; low confidence, isolation, perceptions of prejudice⁴ and out of date references and work experience⁵, make moving into and sustaining employment a challenge.

Yet, in the six and a half years between May 2010 and December 2017, the Employment and Training team supported 182 people to move into employment in tandem with support from staff and volunteers across Cork Simon's services. This collective 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, for example, participation in addiction counselling or in activities that help build confidence and social skills and give structure to the day, or even through a kind word and the offer of a listening ear. Similarly, this cross-community support is most important when it comes to supporting people to sustain employment.

Work gives people hope for the future and can bring financial stability and social and psychological benefits (Crane M. 2016), and can improve physical and mental wellbeing (Waddell, 2006). Work can be a catalyst for life change (Hough et al., 2013). Employment can offer the chance of a permanent break from homeless services and can be a bridge to long-term, sustainable, independent living in local communities.

Research aims

The research tracks 18 people who commenced employment during the first six months of 2017 and follows their progress over 25 months. Longitudinal and qualitative, the research aims to identify the difference working makes to the participants' lives, common challenges they face, supports that helped them maintain work and supports that may have been missing.

This research will give voice to the experiences and needs of people who are homeless or formerly homeless as they move into and journey through employment; its findings will help to improve the range of supports offered to this group.

¹ 78% of Cork Simon service users have experienced 4 or more ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). (Lambert, S. & Gill-Emerson, G., 2017).

² 65% of Cork Simon Community experienced early school leaving. (Cork Simon Community, Working It Out, 2012).

³ (Cork Simon Community, 2010).

⁴ Finnerty, J. (2018) Last Report: Vulnerabilities, resilience and quality of life in a homeless population.

⁵ 92% of Cork Simon service users are long-term unemployed. (Cork Simon Community, Working It Out, 2012).

Research structure

The research will be published in three parts. This report, Part 1, 'A Working Life: The Early Days' explores the participants early days in work. It documents their backgrounds and the jobs they secure. It examines the challenges they face, the positives they gain and the supports they value in the early days.

Part 2 will explore the groups continuing journey through work and Part 3 will examine the employers' perspective.

Literature review

A literature review identified the below points as key factors influencing success in sustaining work:

1. Confidence and self-esteem.
2. Understanding appropriate work-related behaviour (fitting in, understanding unwritten rules).
3. Support.
 - a. Supportive, available manager.
 - b. Mentoring / coaching.
4. Positive friendships and relationships.
5. Mental and physical well-being.
6. Sufficient money.
7. Suitable accommodation.
8. Skills and qualifications.

These key factors were used in the development of a survey.

Literature sources relevant to factors influencing success in sustaining work included: Hough et al. (2013) *Keeping Work: starting and staying in work after homelessness*; Business in the Community, (2009) *Making Work, Work*; Crisis (2011) *Coaching Into Employment*.

Methodology

Recruiting Participants

- 21 people started work through the Employment and Training Programme during the first six months of 2017. The Employment and Training Coordinator made initial contact with 18 of the 21 (3 people were no longer contactable) and all 18 agreed to participate in the research.

Interview Timings

- The first participant within the 6-month timeframe (January – June 2017) started work in January 2017 and the final participant started in May 2017. Interviews with the 18 participants took place between 28 February and 09 October 2017.
- The aim was to interview participants approximately 3 - 4 weeks after they commenced employment, but this varied due to interviewees and interviewer's availability.
- Among those still working at the time of their interview, the median length of time in employment at the time of interview was 5 weeks.

- Among those for whom employment had ceased by the time of interview, the median length of time since employment at the time of interview was 3 weeks.

Interview Structure

- Interviews were conducted through semi-structured surveys, which included qualitative and quantitative questions.
- Sophie Johnston conducted the interviews, two of which required a translator.
- Most interviews took place at the Employment and Training team’s offices. Some took place at another Cork Simon location and some at cafés.
- 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.
- If participants agreed, interviews were recorded. Survey forms were also completed and notes taken by the interviewer.
- Participants received a €10 voucher in recognition of their time and input.

Analysis

- Qualitative data was analysed using SPSS and quantitative data using NVivo.

Figure 1: Work and Interview Timings

Figure 1 denotes when employment started and where applicable, ended for the 18 participants and when their interviews took place. Participants 1 and 3 were employed in two jobs.



Summary

As they moved into work, over three-quarters of participants did not have the security of stable housing. All but two of the 18 participants had experienced the trauma of homelessness with the majority experiencing long-term homelessness. Almost 40% were in early recovery and one third were long-term unemployed. The majority reported good physical and mental health, had recent training and work experience and showed good confidence and self-esteem, despite their experiences of homelessness, demonstrating the road they have already travelled.

Participants are highly motivated 'to get back to work'. This is a way of life that they know, or knew, and value. Their willingness and determination to work is reflected in the jobs they take and the lengths some go to just to get to work.

An overarching motivation among participants for working is the belief that employment can be a catalyst for life-change, albeit modest, with participants making references to seeking 'a normal life'.

Hoped-for changes include independent housing, supporting one's family, seeing more of one's children, meaningful occupation, independence, improved self-esteem, paying debts and staying sober.

Timing, however, is crucial when returning to work. If people have other pressing matters to attend to, remaining focused on the job becomes more challenging.

Returning to work while staying in emergency accommodation is one such example of ill-timing and the emergency shelter environment did indeed pose a significant challenge to the 57% that were staying there as they moved into work, with sleep disturbance and lack of peace to process the day noted.

Every participant was involved in physically demanding work and this, coupled with physically challenging commutes was a significant challenge, particularly in the first few weeks while the body adjusted.

While participants' finances improved overall when working, financial difficulties in the early weeks of work could cause considerable stress. Participants were engaged in physically demanding, often low-skilled work and if financial rewards were affected, it could challenge people's rationale for working.

There are reports in the early days of new-found optimism, improving self-image and the satisfaction of occupation, indicating that hopes of change in the area of mental health can be realised in the short term.

Hopes of independent housing (and usually connected to this, improved access with children) are likely to be slower to be achieved because of the current housing market; when not realised, motivation for working can be threatened.

Life and work factors can both pose challenges to people in their early days of work, therefore both 'life support' and 'work support' is critical in supporting people through these early days and can best be achieved through a holistic, co-ordinated approach including all relevant services and supports.

If people can persevere, life and work can improve. Participants reported adapting to an early rise, building up strength and stamina for physical commutes and physically demanding work, shifts

changing, accommodation changing or improving and, quite quickly feeling the mental health benefits of work. Knowing this may help people stay the course in the early days.

Challenges in the Early Days:

- Staying in emergency accommodation – lack of sleep, lack of peace and a clash of some shelter opening hours and work hours were reported.
- Finances in the early weeks – some participants experienced delayed payments due to working a week in arrears and some were paid by cheque and had to wait a week for the cheque to clear. Coupled with this, many were on emergency tax. Errors and delays in payments and extra responsibility without extra pay was also reported by some.
- The toll on the body of physical work and often a physically challenging commute. Compounding this, some participants reported inadequate sleep and nutrition.
- Adapting to new routines both inside the workplace with new systems and processes and outside of work with an early rise and the logistics of getting to work.
- Coping with the clash of work and pressing personal matters.
- Coping with repetitive work and low morale.
- Understanding appropriate workplace behaviour.

Positives in the early days:

- The job offer brings hope and optimism.
- Changing identity and improved self-image.
- Meaningful occupation – feeling purposeful and useful.
- Enjoying teamwork and a social outlet – combating social exclusion.
- Improved self-reported physical and mental health ratings.
- Improved finances and the ability to clear debts.
- Managing problem alcohol use.

Outcomes and Findings

Outcomes

At the time of interview:

- 20 contracts had been secured by 18 participants; 2 people were employed in second jobs.
- 67% (n.12) of participants were still in employment; 33% (n.6) of participants were no longer working.
- 57% worked in jobs of the same skill level as their previous job; 43% worked in jobs of a lower skill level than their previous job.
- Overall, participants rated their physical and mental health as better at the time of the interview compared to the previous 12 months.
 - While 89% rated their physical health as good or very good over the previous 12 months, 100% rated it as good or very good at the time of interview.
 - While 55% rated their mental health as good or very good over the previous 12 months, 72% rated it as good or very good at the time of interview.
- Since starting work, 56% said they were 'managing well' or 'doing alright' but 33% said they were 'just about getting by' and 5% said they were 'finding it quite difficult' (system missing 5%).
- As they commenced employment, 57% of participants were staying in emergency accommodation; 68% were staying in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation⁶. At the time of interview, this had decreased to 33% in emergency accommodation; 50% in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation.
- Progression out of emergency accommodation came about through one move to social housing, one to private rented, two moves to temporary supported housing and one move to (very) temporary insecure accommodation.
- 8 participants experienced their employment ending. 6 were no longer working at the time of the interview; 2 had secured a second job.
- Among the 8 contracts that had ended by the time of interview, employment had lasted between 3 and 12 weeks. Mean length of employment was 6.2 weeks.

Key Findings

1. Participants are **highly motivated** to work. They are clear about the difference working could make to their lives. They know the value and importance of work and working is intrinsic to their understanding of a 'normal life'. This is reflected in the fact that almost all participants have worked before with over three-quarters having worked all or most of their lives. Their

⁶ Two people were staying in temporary insecure accommodation as they commenced work. One was staying at a short-term let and another was staying with his partner's family.

motivation and determination to work is also reflected in the physically demanding work they take; the physically challenging commutes many must make and the circumstances under which many commence work, such as living in emergency accommodation.

2. Participants' overarching **motivation** for working is to **restore or to build a life**. Participants refer to a number of motivating factors that combine to help create this life. The strongest of these individual motivating factors is to **gain housing**, and **to support family and/or improve access with children** (the latter is often dependent on housing). Housing is identified as a component of the overall plan to build or restore a life, reflecting the concept that housing alone will not provide a meaningful life; rather it is one of a number of pieces of a jigsaw that together build a life. Other components motivating participants to work include independence, escape from social welfare, meaningful occupation, to pay debts and stay sober.
3. The **timing** of returning to work is essential. If starting work clashes with other significant life events it can make sustaining work very stressful and difficult.
4. **Emergency accommodation** can be highly disruptive to working. Disturbed sleep, lack of peace, lack of privacy, lack of independent facilities, hours of operation and "the general chaos and mayhem" of the emergency shelter environment cause stress.
5. **Emergency shelter staff** can and do help people through their early days in work. From wake-up calls, to organising food out of hours, to finding more suitable accommodation within the emergency shelter system. Participants were very grateful for these small acts which made a big difference to their ability to work.
6. Sustaining work can require **'life support' as well as 'work support'**. 'In work' and 'outside work' challenges were experienced in almost equal measures. One third of participants (n.6) experienced significant stress⁷ when starting work. For 5 of these 6 participants stress was not related to work but was caused by personal factors such as a significant life event, or external factors, such as living in emergency accommodation. This highlights the need for holistic, cross service support to sustain work.
7. **The early weeks in work can be particularly hard financially; issue with pay can challenge motivation to continue working**. Financial issues included delayed payments, errors in wages, emergency tax, repaying debts, accruing rent arrears and expenditure on travel. Participants at one company experienced a three-week delay to their first payment – they worked their first week in arrears, were paid by cheque at the end of their second week and at the end of their third week, their cheques cleared. Many were simultaneously affected by emergency tax so when they finally received their pay, it was much reduced. One participant in this situation described accruing two and a half weeks rent arrears during these early weeks. Participants at two companies experienced other delays and errors in their wages. Participants are often working long hours in physically demanding, often low skilled jobs and wages are a key reward. If disrupted, it caused much stress and anxiety and tested people's perseverance.
8. The early weeks in work **take their toll on people physically**. All participants were employed in physically demanding work, some worked 12 hours shifts, many had long, physically challenging

⁷ They rated their stress on starting work as between 7 and 10 out of 10.

commutes, there were reports of pain and there were reports of inadequate sleep and nutrition. Getting used to the 'physicality' of work was most commonly described as the 'hardest part' of work. Participants do note however that within about two weeks the body adjusts to these physical demands.

9. A **change in accommodation** is unlikely to happen, in the early days, as a result of securing employment. In being a core goal and motivation for the majority, there is a risk that not fulfilling this goal could challenge motivation to continue working. The psychological rewards of working will however be felt much sooner.

10. **Work is good for the head!** The psychological benefit of work, such as meaningful occupation and improved self-image, was the most commonly identified 'best part' of starting work. Psychological benefits can be immediate, with the very job offer fostering hope and optimism. 28% of participants reported better mental health at the time of interview than during the 12 months prior to interview. 4 out of the 5 participants who reported improved mental health were still in employment at the time of interview, but mental health benefits were also evident among those who did not sustain work with participants expressing pride in what they achieved while employed.

11. The main **rewards of work in the early days** included psychological benefits as above, and also social benefits of feeling included and the camaraderie of being part of a team, income and being able to support family and clear debts.

12. The main **challenges of work in the early days** by participants were accommodation related issues (see 4 above), financial issues (see 7 above) and adapting to the physicality of work (see 8 above).

13. The early days in work appear to be the **hardest**. Advice from participants is to **persevere**. This is backed up by examples of accommodation improving, shifts changing, payments being regularised and the body adjusting to the physicality of work and commutes.

The Participants

Overview

As they moved into work, over three-quarters of participants did not have the security of a stable, safe base. Over half (56%) were living in emergency accommodation, 11% were staying in temporary insecure accommodation and another 11% were in private rented accommodation that was detrimental to their well-being.

Participants experiences of homelessness varied between being at risk of homelessness (11%), currently homeless (56%) and recent (up to 2 years) experience of homelessness (32%).

Of the 89% who had experienced homelessness, roughly half were homeless for less than a year and roughly half for more than a year. One man was homeless for 12 years.

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

Relationship breakdown (39%) was the most common reason for participants losing their last accommodation and a number of participants spoke about the trauma at this time in their lives.

Just over half of participants reported problematic alcohol and drug use or gambling in the past 12 months.⁸ However 39% are now in recovery. This could make them vulnerable but also indicates their strengths and the journey they have travelled in the past 12 months.

A significant majority (89%) of participants self-report good/very good physical health. Self-reported mental health ratings are lower with just over half reporting good/very good health in the past 12 months. Levels of confidence and self-esteem however are strong, and this can be an important factor in returning to and sustaining work.

All but one of the participants have worked before, with two-thirds working in the last year. The most common area of past work experience was construction where 1 in 5 had worked.

The remaining third are long-term unemployed⁹ and all but one of this cohort have also experienced long-term homelessness.

Many participants are skilled workers – 56% of people’s most recent work experience was skilled or semi-skilled. In addition, a significant majority (83%) have taken part in training¹⁰ facilitated by the Employment and Training team.

⁸ They rated alcohol, drugs or gambling to have had a negative effect on their lives of 7 or more out of 10, in the past 12 months.

⁹ They have been unemployed for 12 months or more.

¹⁰ 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 course were availed of by service users in 2017. The most popular courses in 2017 were Manual Handling, Food Safety & HACCP and SafePass. (Cork Simon Community. 2017. *Employment & Training Project Operation Report*).

Half of participants had attended ‘Jobs Club¹¹’ and one third had participated in ‘Step to Work¹²’ facilitated by the Employment and Training Team, in preparation for work. Also, 67% were engaged in an Employment and Training organised mentoring programme on commencement of work¹³.

Over a third (39%) of participants had debts as they started work and half of participants had family (partner and/or child/ren) to support.

Participants’ backgrounds are further detailed in Appendix 1.

How representative is the study group of Cork Simon service users?

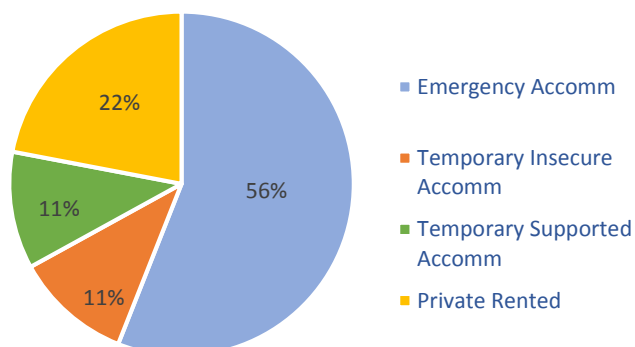
There is a slightly lower representation of women, a significantly higher representation of non-Irish nationals and a somewhat higher representation of 45-64 year olds among the study group than among the general Cork Simon service user population. Physical and mental health are better among the study group. Rates of long-term unemployment are much lower but skill level and amounts of work experience are quite comparable¹⁴.

Housing & Homelessness in detail

Accommodation at the start of work:

As they moved into work, a majority of people (56% n.10) were staying in emergency accommodation. A further 11% (n.2) were staying in temporary insecure accommodation¹⁵ and can be considered at risk of homelessness. The remaining third of participants were housed in private rented (22% n.4) or temporary supported accommodation¹⁶ (11% n.2).

Accommodation at Start of Work



¹¹ The Employment and Training Project runs a weekly ‘Jobs Club’ where attendees are supported with practical job search preparations such as conducting job searches, completing application forms, C.V. writing and interview practice.

¹² 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 made unpaid work experiences illegal.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ Comparisons are made to Cork Simon Community, (2018). *Keeping Count*.

¹⁵ One person was staying in an expensive short-term let and another was staying with his partner’s family.

¹⁶ Shared housing provided by Cork Simon Community.

Experiences of homelessness:

16 of the 18 participants had prior experience of homelessness. The two people staying in temporary insecure accommodation had not experienced homelessness. However, given the insecure nature of their current accommodation, they are considered at risk of homelessness.

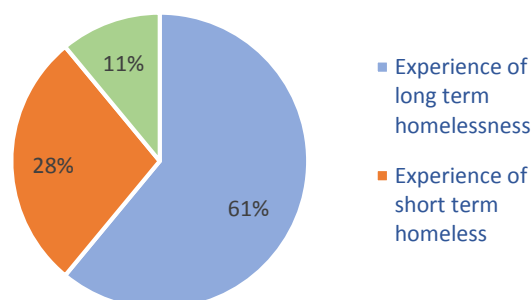
Participants' experiences of homelessness ranged between 5 weeks and 12 years with roughly half of participants homeless less than a year and roughly half homeless more than a year.

Among those in emergency accommodation, less than half were short-term homeless; over half were long-term homeless¹⁷.

Participants in private rented and temporary supported accommodation were living at their current address between 6 weeks and 2 years. One third had experienced short-term homelessness and two-thirds had experienced long-term homelessness prior to their current housing.

In all, 61% (n.11) of participants had been or were currently long-term homeless, 28% (n.5) had been or were currently short-term homeless and 11% (n.2) were at risk of homelessness.

Experience of Homelessness



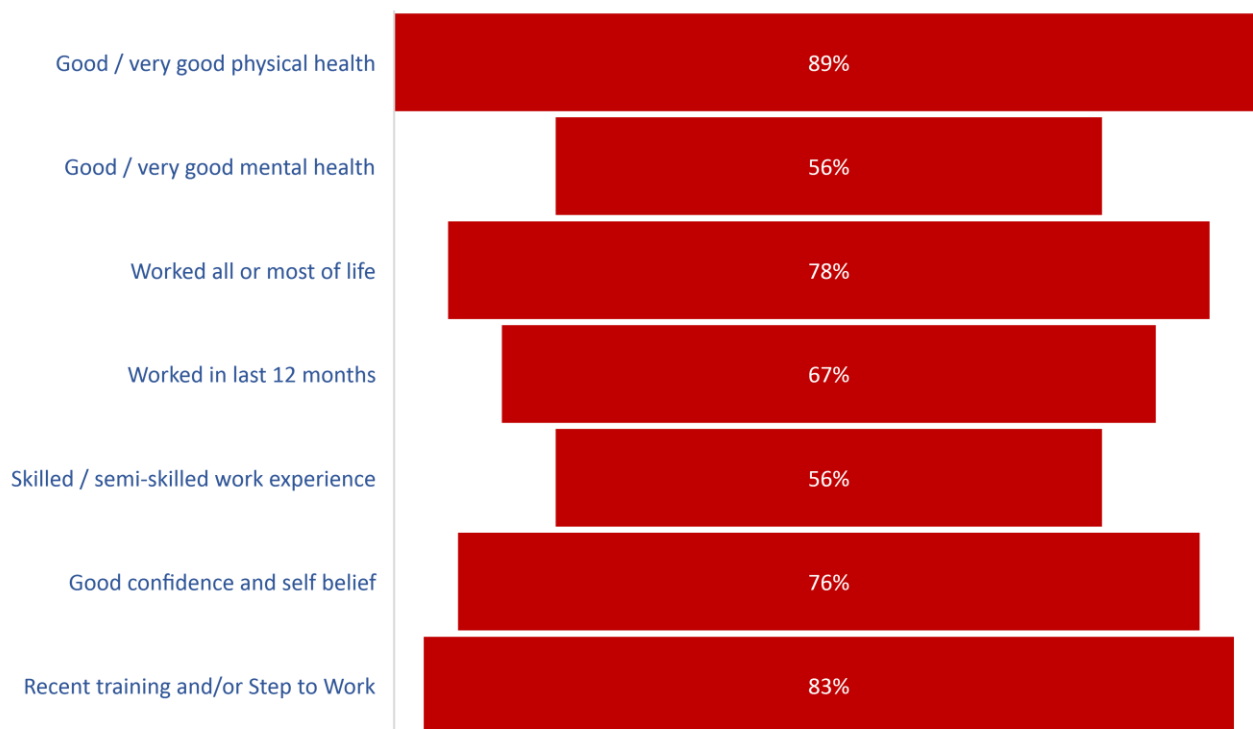
Starting work – concerns and strengths

Figure 2: The Participant Group – Starting Work – Concerns



¹⁷ Long-term homelessness is defined by Government as continuous or episodic stays of six months or more in emergency accommodation.

Figure 3: The Participant Group – Starting Work – Strengths



Jobs & Contracts

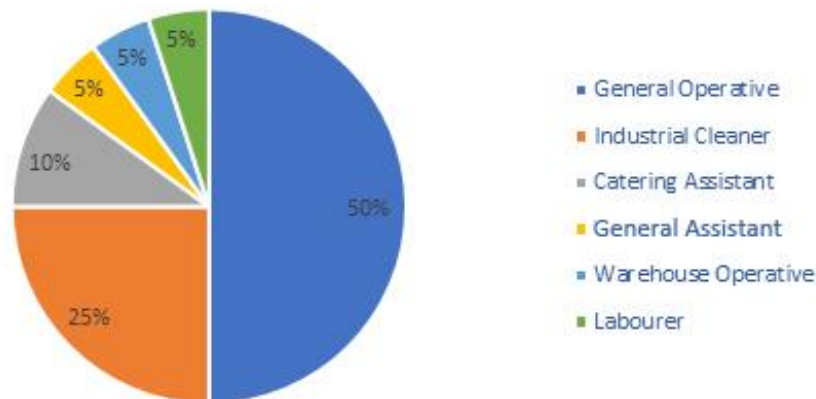
Contracts

- Across the 18 participants, 20 contracts were recorded – 2 people resigned from their first jobs and secured a second job. (Another person resigned from their job and secured a work trial, but it did not progress to employment).
- 85% (n.17) of contracts were sourced by the Employment and Training Team, 10% (n.2) were sourced by individuals with support from the Employment and Training Team and 5% (n.1) by an individual before engaging with the Employment and Training Team.
- 95% (n.19) of contracts were for full-time employment; 5% (n.1) were for part-time employment.
- 65% (n. 13) of contracts were for permanent employment, 30% (n.6) were for fixed-term contracts (this included one fixed-term community employment contract – this represented the one part-time contract) and 5% (n.1) was unknown.

Job Positions

- 6 different job positions across the 20 contracts were recorded. 50% were General Operatives, 25% Industrial Cleaners, 10% Catering Assistants, 5% General Assistant, 5% Labourer and 5% Warehouse Operative.

Job Titles



Wages

- Wages ranged from €9.35 per hour to €11.05 per hour. (Minimum wage is €9.25).
 - €9.99 per hour was the average wage per job title.
 - €9.78 per hour was the average wage per contract.

Skill & Qualifications

- People have downgraded their work skill level considerably in order to return to work. 85% of contracts could be classed as unskilled, 10% as semi-skilled and 5% as skilled manual. However, over 50% of people's most recent work experience was skilled or semi-skilled work.
- In all, 43% were employed in jobs requiring a lower skill level than their previous job.
- 56% (n.10) did not have previous experience in their area of current work and 89% (n.16) did not have relevant training. This is most likely because the vast majority of positions were unskilled and previous experience was not required and relevant training was not required and/or not available.

Getting started

Why work?

The participants are highly motivated to work. They're clear about the difference working could make to their lives. They know the value and importance of work and working is intrinsic to their understanding of a 'normal life'. This is reflected in the fact that almost all have worked before with over three-quarters having worked all or most of their lives.

The overarching motivation for working among participants is to live a life again. There are references to building or re-building a life, to progressing life and to escaping the current life – one person simply says, "I wouldn't be homeless". The overall motivation is that work could be a catalyst for life change.

Supporting family and improving access and relationships with children is a strong and specific motivator. So is housing – either to secure housing and escape homelessness or to find better, more suitable housing. Improved access to children is often dependant on securing housing.

"I wanted to start my own life. I have a son here - he motivates me. I know work is important."

"Progress. Without progress of learning we will be the same. Learning gives us possibility to be ... to do better."

"Get out of homeless services, be able to rent and to provide for my daughter and partner. If I have my own place, I can get overnights with my daughter. So, the motivation I've got behind that - I don't care what it is - I will do whatever it takes to get a house. I have to."

Reflecting the isolation and uncertainty of homelessness, people are craving both the independence and connectedness of a 'normal life' and see work leading to this.

"Socialise here, know the society well, the culture, having friends, just normal things."

"To be more independent like before. To have your own accommodation... nobody telling you what to do... you don't depend on the time when to come in the hostel, you don't depend on the rules, you have your own accommodation. A normal life. Even, for example, you want to meet a girlfriend, where can I invite her?"

Participants also talked about meaningful occupation - feeling useful and purposeful - as a motivator.

"Money was one thing - to occupy mind was another. Doing nothing was hard. Too much free time - bad ideas, bad decisions. Good to be occupied."

Connected to this, there is a strong sense that participants do not want to be dependent on social welfare – it's often spoken about with a sense of shame. Starting work is an escape from this and contributes to people's improving self-esteem.

“There is possibility to change post office address. When I discovered this possibility, I decided to change post office, not because of location but because I was ashamed to collect money from same lady in post office for so long. Shame is huge power.”

“I think if it was even the same money I would be receiving on the dole but it's more satisfaction when you're going to work. When I was on the dole, it was like... I'm a healthy young man, it was kinda a shame. But now, I'm feeling more satisfied now.”

“I know work is important. I knew inside here I needed to find something. It was too long taking payment every week.”

Other reasons to work were to pay debts, to help stay sober and for the enjoyment of working.

“No point not to work. Even if I will be a millionaire or something, I still will do it, or maybe do some furniture. I enjoy it. it doesn't matter what kind of work.”

Money in itself is not a motivator. Money is of value for the difference it could make to participants lives.

“€510 a week; the only way that would make a difference would be if I had my own place.”

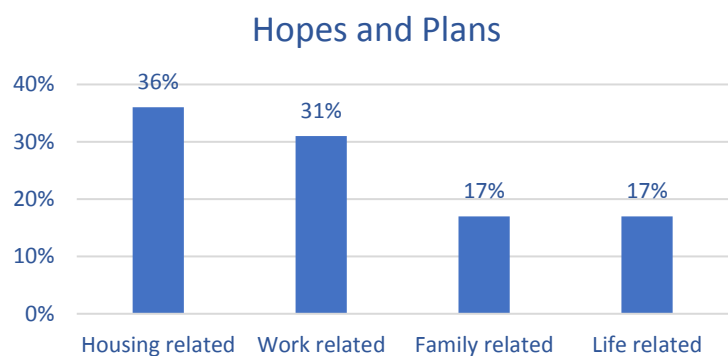
“Don't have big expectations from life; just want some comfort. Not mad about money; just need money to live. Enough money to pay the rent. Not asking for more than that.”

“The money's not everything. It's really not. If you ain't got hope and happiness, then money don't mean shite.”

Hopes and Plans

Participants were asked about their hopes and plans for the next 12 months.

Securing suitable housing – either finding housing and escaping homelessness or moving to more suitable housing, described by 36% of participants, was the most commonly cited hope or plan.



Hopes and plans in the area of work were second most common. These included finding work again, changing jobs, taking on a second job and gaining specific training.

Family related hopes and plans included improving access and relationships with children, being able to provide for family and one participant was working on a difficult plan of family reunification.

Life related hopes and dreams were both general and specific, from participants hoping to be able to “live a little” or “have a good life”, to specifics including buying a car or a scooter, being in a relationship and learning German (for pleasure).

Feelings in anticipation of work

Work ready

The vast majority (83%) felt ready to start or return to work. For most participants, returning to work was not a big deal – they are used to work. This is in-keeping with three-quarters having worked all or most of their lives and two-thirds having worked in the past year. Also, 83% had participated in Training¹⁸ and 50% had participated in Step to Work¹⁹, bringing their skills and experience up to date.

One participant commented on the how the support he received from the Employment and Training Team helped him become work ready: *“Our self-esteem is poor because of period of life without job. Atmosphere in this place was so positive, I feel so much support that my imagination about my possibilities grow up. As result of that I can imagine I can go anywhere and ask for a job. It was too difficult and stressful for me a few months ago – now I feel I could do it.”*

One participant who said he felt ready, qualified his answer: *“I thought I was, but I wasn't. Not while I was living in the Shelter anyway. That just had me killed to be honest.”* He in fact wasn't ready at this time due to personal and accommodation factors and his employment didn't last.

Those that felt ready generally expressed their happiness regards starting work, and also their familiarity and comfort with the routine of the working life.

“Simple for me – there is work, I'm going to work. I understand that way of life... getting up, going to work, coming home, dinner.”

“I couldn't say I was really excited. For me it's a job, it's an income – like, routine. But yeah, I was delighted that I have a job.”

The remaining 17% (n.3) felt they were ‘somewhat ready’ to start or return to work – two people were aware they had personal matters to attend to that could make starting work a challenge and one person was concerned as to whether she would be able for the job.

¹⁸ 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 most popular courses in 2017 were Manual Handling, Food Safety & HACCP and SafePass. (Cork Simon Community. 2017. *Employment & Training Project Operation Report*).

¹⁹ 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.

Hope and optimism

The very offer of a job could foster hope and optimism:

"I felt as proud as punch because I knew that I was sober and I knew that I could accomplish it. I felt like everything is coming into play - there is hope out there. There is someone there to give me a chance to go and work."

"Instead of feeling useless, lack of any skills, no self-esteem – instead of that I started to feel probably there is some value inside of me if someone offers me a job."

"Hope! For changing my hopeless situation. And proud."

Worries and concerns

The majority had no worries or concerns about returning to or starting work. Among the minority who expressed concerns, those concerns related mainly to the work, specifically to 'being able' for the job.

"I knew it's a busy environment and I wasn't sure if this job was for me. Would I be too slow? Would I be organised?"

"I was concerned because I haven't done anything like this before. It's the first experience and I was a little afraid that I couldn't handle it or something."

"I was very excited on the one hand to have at least something, an official tax-payer job. But I knew it would be difficult. I know that I will not survive for such a long time because it's very physical."

One participant, felt considerable pressure in advance of the job to success:

*"I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. Everyone would be ringing you... congratulations on the new job all that kinda craic and you'd be like awf f*ck off like, would you leave me alone like. Your head would be done in then cause you're thinking awf I'm gonna leave everyone down."*

Timing is important

While the vast majority of people felt ready to start work, the timing was not always right.

People need to be in the 'right place' to successfully start and sustain work. Other commitments, responsibilities and pressures need to be considered before committing to work. Sometimes there was little time to consider whether or not to take a job.

Starting work clashed with moving into housing for one participant, causing stress and contributing to his decision to resign.

"It all happened too fast. I was just getting notification that I was getting an apartment and then I had a phone call that there was a job going. It was a Friday morning that he rang me and then he said look be down 8 o'clock Monday so basically, I didn't really have time to think. But I didn't realise

it was going to cause quite a bit of chaos. It's nearly a full-time job to get everything set up [re. house]. You definitely need at least one full week at it if not two. The house had to come first."

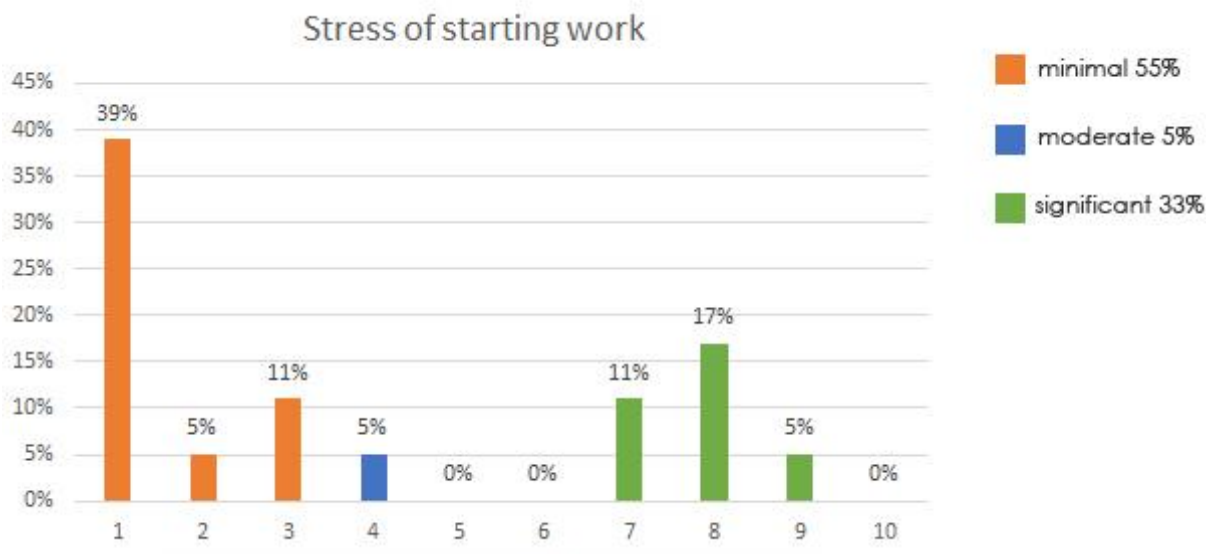
Starting work clashed with important meetings and an upcoming court case for another participant, adding stress and putting the job at risk. He managed to maintain work but acknowledged his head was elsewhere for the first two week of work.

"Those first two weeks were a complete struggle for me. I had a lot going on. My head was 30% on the work and 70% back on things that were happening on the outside, the appointments that I had to keep. I still had one court case that I had to finish – that I had to attend. I was constantly on the phone as well. I apologised to him, made amends and I haven't let him down since."

A third participant was in 'early recovery' and acknowledged the timing of starting work wasn't right for him.

Stress of starting work

Participants were asked to rate how stressful they found starting work on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being not at all stressful and 10 being very stressful.



55% (n.10) of participants rated the stress of starting work as minimal (between 1 and 3).

However, 33% (n.6) of participants rated the stress of starting work as significant (between 7 and 10). Among the six people who rated the stress of starting work as significant, four also rated their support as significant. Significant stress on starting work was caused by conditions in the workplace for only one person; for the remainder, significant stress was caused by personal or external factors. The issues causing stress for these 6 people are detailed below. The common themes were:

- It being the wrong time to start work i.e. a clash between work and personal commitments.
- The challenge of living in emergency accommodation while working.

Person	Issues causing significant stress
Persons 1, 2 & 3	Three people acknowledged it was 'not the right time' to start work (as detailed above in 'Timing is Important') – one person was in early recovery, one person had pressing personal commitments to attend to, and one person was moving into housing. All three were unable to give work their full focus. Two resigned and one continued work.
Person 4	Although this person felt ready to start work, was initially enthusiastic and could clearly articulate his motivation for working, soon after starting he felt under pressure to make a success of the job and anxiety set in. Other factors, including budgeting, nutrition, drug use and the ill effects of the shelter environment then came into play, adding to his stress. All in all, although he had availed of preparatory supports – Jobs Club ²⁰ , Step to Work ²¹ , training and mentoring, he wasn't ready for the reality of the work. He didn't sustain the job.
Person 5	Living circumstances made working particularly stressful for this person – for the first 3 weeks of work he was in an 8-bed dorm. He then moved to temporary supported housing. He sustained the job.
Person 6	This person felt a lot of pressure was put on him in work. He felt he was being treated as a supervisor to what he considered to be unmotivated colleagues without extra pay for this extra responsibility and with little communication or support from his manager. He sustained the job.

These issues are dealt with in more detail in 'Challenges in the early days'.

²⁰ The Employment and Training Project runs a weekly 'Jobs Club' where attendees are supported with practical job search preparations such as conducting job searches, completing application forms, C.V. writing and interview practice.

²¹ 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 made unpaid work experiences illegal.

The Working Day: participants' experiences

Getting up and getting there

An early rise

It takes time for the mind and the body to adjust to getting up at new times and to working long hours. This is described as challenge for up to a month by one participant:

"Motivation - do you know when you're so long at waking up at a certain ... and for all that to change overnight that you have to wake up at 6 o'clock in the morning. That's the motivation that people find hard to start off with. I found it difficult, so I had the staff waking me up for the first 3, 4 weeks. Now I wake up at 5.45 every morning. The first couple of weeks I couldn't even hear my alarm. Now I'm so used to it I want more of it. And I want more of a challenge while I am at work - I don't want something for nothing."

Another participant describes the difficulty of an early rise when in shared accommodation:

"I had to wake up at 4.30. I share the room with two other girls and everybody was sleeping at that time so I try to be quiet. The light shouldn't be turned on so I had to sneak out to the bathroom, take a shower quietly and the kitchen is closed... it's not a normal morning routine where you wake up, turn up the radio, you know."

Physically challenging commutes

Many participants experienced a physical commute (often 45 – 60 minutes) before a day of physical work, followed by the same after work.

One participant had to leave his house at 5am and cycle for an hour to the train station as buses did not run at this time. He'd then catch a train and walk 40 minutes before starting a physically demanding job at 7am. He explains the toll this took:

"Wrecked tired. An hour's cycle, going to the train station and you're wrecked tired. Start work then at 7 and you're just wrecked for the day. And then you're cycling home, getting something to eat, going to bed to cycle again in the morning."

He was doing well in his job and exceeding his targets, but the commute ultimately made the job unsustainable.

Another participant explained how for him, in the beginning, work and his commute were all the one in his mind:

"At first because I wasn't used to the job, for me this [the commute] was part of the job - going to the job. I was already tired when I got there."

There is evidence of how transport costs eat into low wages, especially in the first few weeks as people get used to their route to work. One person reported spending about €50 on bus tickets and

on taxis on a Sunday during his first week in work. He then organised a bike and started cycling and walking to save money. Similarly, another participant worked out a more economical way to travel:

“When shifts changed to incorporate an evening shift, I was planning in advance. I bought a second-hand bike for €30 and I don't mind just to cycle after work.”

A hard day's work

Every participant was employed in physically demanding work (no job was sedentary). This often followed on from a long, physically demanding commute. Adapting to the physicality of the work was frequently described as ‘the hardest part’ of starting work. There were some reports of injury and pain. Many participants acknowledged however that within about two weeks, they felt their bodies adjusted.

“It was physically difficult because I didn't work one and a half year, like really physical work so it was kinda difficult the first week for the body to get used to it.”

“It is really hard work. The first two weeks... I couldn't feel my hands. My left hand was like a balloon. It's common to everyone who is working upstairs for the first couple of weeks.”

“Other people were able, but I couldn't. Maybe I'm old or not fit enough but I really had bad back, so I took Paracetamol day by day because I was suffering.”

Getting into a rhythm

While many participants hit the ground running, some described their first week or two as an adjustment phase, during which they were ‘getting up to speed’ with the work.

“First week I wasn't fast enough. Told you need to do everything double fast. I started working faster. I wanted to work there.”

“I was pretty confident that I could eventually get used to it. It was hard at first but not one of those jobs where you feel a little lost. Eventually I get used to it.”

“First week was hard... finding out what to do, but after that I clicked on to things and I was enjoying it.”

Much of the work was low skilled and could be repetitive. Participants describe finding ways to manage the day and the nature of the work.

“If you put your head into it, the day will fly. If your head's not in a job, the day will drag out. So, I put my head into it as much as I can. Some days are more exciting than others. I wouldn't say its anywhere near challenging.”

“It's physically challenging. It's repetitive job but it's do-able and gets into your head and you do it little bit automatically and the day goes by.”

Participants start to feel the benefits of productivity. Homelessness can be a very disempowering experience; boredom and lack of purpose can take hold. A commonly cited benefit of working was the positive effects of meaningful occupation – of “doing something” and “feeling useful”.

“It was great to feel that I was doing something again.”

“Satisfaction that you're not wasting your time, you're not wasting your life, you're doing something. I think if it was even the same money I would be receiving on the dole but it's more satisfaction when you're going to work. When I was on the dole, it was like I'm a healthy young man, it was kinda a shame for yourself. But now, I'm feeling more satisfied now.”

“Sometimes when busy it's hard. Need to organise in your head, set up everything. I'm enjoying it. I feel like I'm doing something. I'm feeling useful.”

Food on the go

Good nutrition would be important to sustain the physical work and physical commutes that were common among participants, yet there were reports of people getting insufficient food during the day. The examples of poor nutrition came from employees at one company where a common complaint was the structure of breaks - they were 15 minutes long and this did not allow enough time to eat when employees also needed to clock in and out and walk to a canteen. Some employees also succumbed to the power of nicotine and a cigarette could take priority over food during a short 15-minute break.

“You're not chewing, you're just swallowing the food - this is the problem - affecting your health. If one break was at least half an hour you could at least have one proper dinner / lunch whatever.”

“You're basically on your feet working for 12 hours with nothing inside ya.”

“In the shift we have three breaks with 15 minute but this is not enough. In 15 minute I can't do everything - eat, drink, going for toilet and smoke, in my case. In my solution, I use first break for smoke, second break for eat and third break for smoke again. I do it like this.”

One participant explained the double impact on her nutrition of not being able to access facilities at her emergency accommodation and of short breaks at work:

“In the morning you had no time to eat because the kitchen was closed and even though there was a small kitchen area in our room, everybody was sleeping. Sometimes I eat something at the train station and I have a chocolate bar or something during the daytime and I took some vitamins. I didn't have time to eat during the day - only 15 minutes break and you have to go to the kitchen, prepare food and it's only 5, 8 minutes left for eating. So, I rather just go out for a smoke and have a cup of coffee and I ate when I came back in the evening.”

She found the work extremely hard physically, she had a physical commute, she suffered back ache and took Paracetamol to get through the day. Inadequate nutrition must have made a hard situation all the worse.

Judging the mood

Morale

Over three quarters of participants reported good morale at work. Many expressed gratitude for their colleagues and the support and camaraderie they offered. Participants were often visibly happy when they spoke about colleagues and a positive work environment. People who are homeless can experience feelings of isolation and exclusion (Finnerty, 2017). Here at work however, participants are experiencing team-work and inclusion.

“The upside of the work is the rest of the staff - I love the people there. We created this group thing, you know. It can be fun. It's still physical work, it's still hard and I can still feel it in my body. But you know some things make up for other things, so like the crew, the staff there - and it's very important to me to work with good team-mates. More important sometimes than the salary and everything because if you're not happy... you know if you're stressed or concerned before you go to work, it's way worse than getting a little less money.”

“Deadly, all of them are. I got on really well with the Polish boys. We had our own little communication going on. All of us were getting on like a house on fire.”

“Nice team. The other staff show me everything, they remind me, they respect me, I respect them. They understand I never before worked in fast food. They show me what to do. All of them are friendly and smiling - this is the best part.”

Good relations contributed to people's enjoyment of work and their willingness to persevere, while low morale could have the reverse effect. Poor morale was created in some workplaces through abrasive management styles, in others through lack of camaraderie due to language barriers and the intensity of the work.

“Every five minutes they'd [supervisors] be doing everybody's head in saying 'you're not doing it fast enough; do you want to be fired' and all this.”

“We had no time to speak because everybody was running and trying to reach their targets as well.”

“Morale is very low. Every single break the people are complaining.”

One participant experienced a clash between her work hours and the hours of operation of her emergency shelter. Her manager agreed to her starting at a later time, but she felt this 'special treatment' alienated her from colleagues:

"I ask my boss if I could start at 9 o'clock so I was the one and only person who worked from 9 o'clock so everybody, not hate me, but dislike me, because I arrive at 9 o'clock and everybody thought I'm lazy."

Finances

The first few weeks in employment were hard financially for many. Over half of participants were affected by emergency tax, some experienced delay with their wages due to payment by cheque, some had relatively high expenditure on travel initially, one accrued rent arrears and another had difficulty budgeting.

In addition, some participants experienced errors, delays and confusion with their wages. People are often working long hours in physically demanding jobs. Wages are a critical part of the reward and if compromised, it can be the final straw, causing stress and anxiety and challenging motivation.

Disputes over pay arose in two places of work - one person received a different wage to what he understood had been agreed, another was paid on a different day to what he understood had been agreed, a third person's wages didn't lodge to his account and a fourth person believed there was a discrepancy between the hours he worked and the hours he was paid. These issues indicate ongoing dialogue and mounting frustration, no doubt affecting participants' morale.

"It was tough. The only thing I was able to think about was salary."

"He said to us he was paying us €10.50 an hour and then on the time sheets it only says €10.05 an hour. But he can't make up his mind where the other 45 cents has gone, he doesn't know where it's gone. The person that sorts out the taxes and cheques, that person doesn't know where the 45 cent has gone. I brought it up with everyone that would listen to me."

"And then getting paid turned into a problem. He kept saying at the very start you'll have your money on Mondays, but it was Thursday before I got the first cheque. It's still going on. It'll be tomorrow [Thursday] before I get last week's cheque."

"Wasn't paid for one week. They said I was. They said there must be a problem with your bank and I went to my bank and they said there's no problem. They said it had gone out of their account. I went into the bank and said is there money going through there that you can see and they goes 'no'. And they goes 'if there's anything transferred we'd be able to see it'."

"I wasn't paid for six and a half hours. They promised me this week I would be paid. If they don't, I will quit the job, honestly."

Boundaries

Participants indicated good boundaries at work. When asked if they would discuss a personal issue at work, the answer from participants was a unanimous no:

"No, I just don't like talking about this kinda stuff to be honest. I think that's your own problem, like."

"I'd talk to my girlfriend. I wouldn't talk to no one in work about my problems."

"Talk to myself! Not talking to other people about problems"

Negative workplace behaviour

Two incidents of negative workplace behaviour were noted:

Starting work clashed with important personal matters for one participant. He was preoccupied and attending to these matters on work time. He recognised this however, amended his behaviour and apologised.

"My head was 30% on the work, 70% back on things that were happening on the outside - all the appointments I had to keep. So I was more concentrated on my appointments than actually staying in working. I was constantly on my phone - I apologised to him, made amends and I haven't let him down since. But those first two weeks were a complete struggle for me."

The second example concerned an employee reacting to frustration and not being aware of the right procedure for handling a pay discrepancy:

*"I had things to be getting and rent to be paying and stuff. And then I freaked out at the boss man and said what's the story with the wages. They didn't pay me, so I said f*ck that boy and I started going in what-ever days I felt like going in and then that's why I lost the job."*

Praise, Promotion and Pressure

Good work by participants is reflected in positive feedback, promotion and extra responsibility. Extra responsibility without extra pay however caused dissatisfaction. This most likely relates to the hard and tiring, low skilled, physical work that most people were employed in; wages are a critical reward for this work.

A number of participants reported praise from their employers and they took pride in this:

"It was great to feel that I was doing something again. We were getting very positive reports."

"They kept coming over telling me that I was doing excellently. On some machines I could be 125% - I was always over the 100 mark. They were delighted with that as well like."

"He rings me up now praising me and thanking me for the job I've done inside there."

One person was promoted from general operative to team leader:

"They saw that I'm doing well and I'm asking the questions about everything... they train me to be team leader."

Three people reported taking on extra responsibility, but this was not arranged in a formal way and caused frustration:

“Very hard to deal with people without motivation. I don't want to feel responsible for them. When supervising I feel I'm wasting my time sometimes because some people not listening”

“There could be something and you'd be trying to explain it to them - I felt I was acting like a foreman. I'm not being paid to be a foreman - I'm only getting the same as everybody else so I kinda felt [manager] should have had more hands-on experience down there.”

“Huge irritation - every week someone's coming, going, coming, going - huge turnover - someone who's working there, for example, 3/4 months, there's more duties on them because they have to do their own job and plus to train new people as well.”

Rest and Relaxation

As previously noted, all participants were engaged in physical work and many also had physically challenging commutes to and from work. One participant describes how a 12 hour shift, plus a commute each side and a 4.30am rise, left her without enough time to recover:

“It was hard to wake up every morning - you came home let's say at 6 o'clock and you had not enough time to recover by the next morning. It was a challenge to tell myself go on, get out of the bed, do the thing that you have to do. I was praying that I just survive that day and just survive another day.”

Another participant noted how the same circumstances (a 12-hour shift coupled with a long commute) meant he didn't see his child:

“Waking at 5 in the morning... working till 7pm and then the train mightn't be until 8 so I'm not getting home until maybe half 8, 9 o'clock and my child be asleep then. I'd be going to bed then and waking up in the morning and he'd more likely still be asleep. Shift changed then to 7am - 3pm. I enjoyed that.”

The noise and disturbance and consequent lack of sleep experienced in shared rooms or dorms in particular, but in the emergency shelter environment in general, was a considerable issue. Coping with the demands of a new job while lacking peace and adequate sleep before the next day's work posed a challenge. Two people identified living in this environment as contributing to the significant stress they felt when starting work.

“It was a nightmare when it was the 12-hour shift because you're coming back from work about 8, half 8 in the evening and you want to sleep and there's still noise and then you have to get up at 5am.”

“Going to work every day and then going back there and listening to the chaos and mayhem that go on inside the building.”

Private rented accommodation was not without its issues. One person was experiencing harassment from a neighbour which was affecting his mental well-being while another was experiencing noise

disturbance. Both situations could impact on the participant's ability to work through stress and fatigue. Both wanted to find alternative accommodation.

"Oh my God, I want to escape from that accommodation. Every weekend clubs around and vibrating over my head. Sometimes during the week as well."

On Reflection

Moving to independent accommodation was a primary motivation for working for most participants. One man reflected on his disappointment when he found himself in employment yet still stuck in emergency accommodation for longer than he had expected. This was beginning to play on his conscience and to challenge his motivation for working:

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

I'm doing my God damn hardest to get me and my partner out of there and it's just like a smack in the face every time we get turned down for a gaff. It's more upsetting than anything else. It's not helping nobody. 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."

Another participant reflected on his changing sense of self-worth since starting work and how employment has changed his perception of his identity:

"Being homeless for me was proof that I'm worthless. Instead of feeling useless, lack of any skills, no self-esteem – instead of that I started to feel probably there is some value inside of me if someone offers me a job. It was impossible to offer me on labour market because my self-esteem was very bad even though I have a lot of work experience."

Now when I recognise some face in the crowd I remember that I was so ashamed about myself that I tried to not meet face-to-face. I was afraid of simple question 'Hello, how are you? What are you doing?' So now I'm not afraid. If someone asks me 'What are you doing?' I have a great answer. And I'm sure that when my children ask 'what are you doing for life?' the answer will be easier. Money, because I worked – not just because I existed."

Where work ended

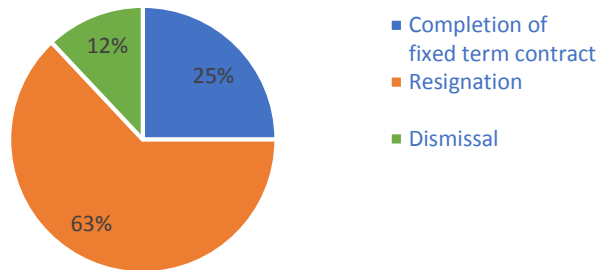
At the time of interview, 67% (n.12) of participants were still in employment; 33% (n.6) of participants were no longer working.

In all, 8 participants experienced their employment ending. 6 participants were no longer working at the time of the interview; 2 had secured a second job.

Among the 8 contracts that had ended by the time of interview, employment had lasted between 3 and 12 weeks. Mean length of employment was 6.2 weeks.

Reasons for the 8 contracts ending included the completion of fixed term contracts for 2 people, resignation (for a variety of reasons as detailed below) by 5 people and 1 person was dismissed.

Reasons for ending of contracts



Reasons for the 5 resignations:

- Competing priorities (securing independent housing at the same time as commencing work)
- An unsustainable commute (following a move from one form of temporary insecure accommodation to another)
- Interpersonal difficulties*
- Personal challenges (early recovery)*
- Unsuitable working conditions (physically challenging work was too intense and causing pain).

* These participants secured a second job.

Reason for the 1 dismissal:

The one dismissal arose from inappropriate workplace behaviour - an employee acted out of frustration following a pay discrepancy; he started working ad hoc days and lost the job as a result. A number of factors made work challenging for this participant though - he was staying in emergency accommodation and not getting adequate sleep, he wasn't eating well, he was smoking joints and he found the work monotonous. He also rated his stress on starting work as significant (8 out of 10). As he said, *"I struggled a lot... it just wasn't clicking"*. The pay discrepancy was the final straw.

Securing work again was a future goal among all 6 of the people who were unemployed at the time of interview.

"There are a lot of positive. I never think that I would be able to do such a physical job and I did 200% because I had back ache, I was hungry, I was thirsty but I'm proud of myself. I gave it up - but I'm proud because at least I tried as much as I could."

Tracking Changes in the Early Days

Changes in health, finances and accommodation are tracked below.

Participants were asked to rate various aspects of their health and finances ‘over the past 12 months’ and ‘at present’ (i.e. at the time of interview). Changes are noted between these two time periods. (While changes in health cannot be attributed solely to starting work, the two time periods and any changes noted between them will provide a benchmark for further comparisons as the research continues to follow the participants’ lives. Changes in finances can be attributed to starting work.)

Changes in accommodation are noted between two time points: accommodation at the start of work and accommodation at the time of interview.

Health

Participants were asked to rate their physical and mental health ‘over the past 12 months’ and ‘at present’ i.e. at the time of interview, using a scale from very poor to very good.

Overall, both physical and mental health ratings were higher at the time of interview compared to the past 12 months.

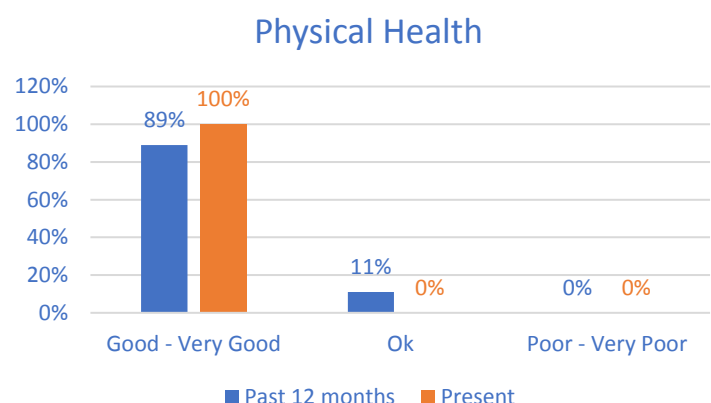
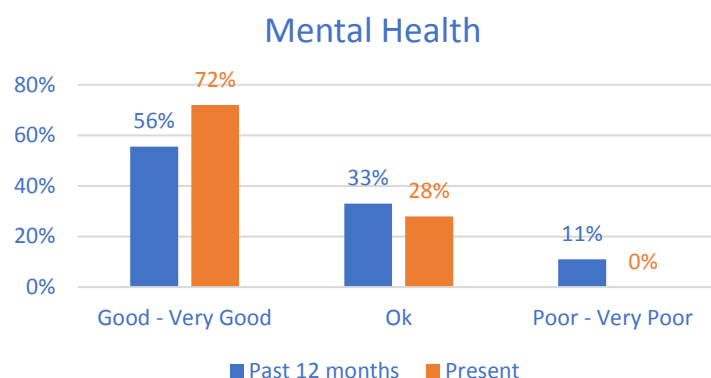
There was a notable change in mental health ratings in particular; over a quarter of participants reporting an improvement in their mental health.

Four fifths of those who noted improvements in their mental health were still in employment.

While 55% rated their mental health as good or very good over the past 12 months, 72% rated it as good or very good at the time of interview.

For 67% (n.12) of people, their mental health remained the same over the past 12 months and at the time of interview, 5% reported a dis-improvement and 28% an improvement.

The one person who reported a dis-improvement attributed it to difficulties with a neighbour in private rented accommodation.



Of the 28%, or five people, who noted an improvement in their mental health, four were in employment. The fifth person was no longer in employment but was housed.

While 89% rated their physical health as good or very good over the past 12 months, 100% rated it as good or very good at the time of interview.

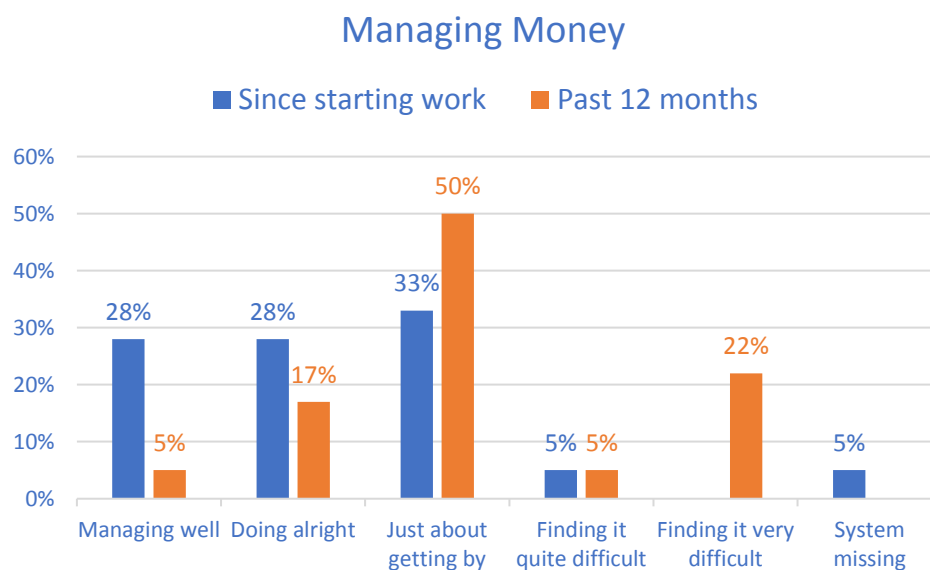
For 67% (n.12) of people, their physical health remained the same over the past 12 months and at the time of interview, 17% (n.3) experienced a dis-improvement in physical health and 17% (n.3) experienced an improvement.

Dis-improvements were from very good to good. Improvements were from ok to good from good to very good.

Finances

Whereas just 22% of participants felt they were ‘managing well’ or ‘doing alright’ financially before starting work, at the time of interview this had more than doubled to 56%.

However, a significant third of participants reported at the time of interview that they were ‘just about getting by’ financially. Among this group of six people, five were still in employment and employment had only recently ended for the sixth person. Factors among these participants that may have affected their finances included having family to support, emergency tax, repaying debts and travel expenses.



One participant describes an improvement in finances since starting work, but only a marginal one:

“Just about better off - I was only about €50 better off and that's after doing your full five days' work and getting up and down from [the place where he was living]. Then you're talking nearly a fiver a day on the bus and then you've your food.”

One person reported he was ‘finding it quite difficult’ to manage his money – he reported finding it difficult to budget an income greater than the amount he was used to receiving in social welfare.

“I knows how to manage my dole; I finds it a lot easier to have less than to have a lot.”

All reasons for financial difficulty included:

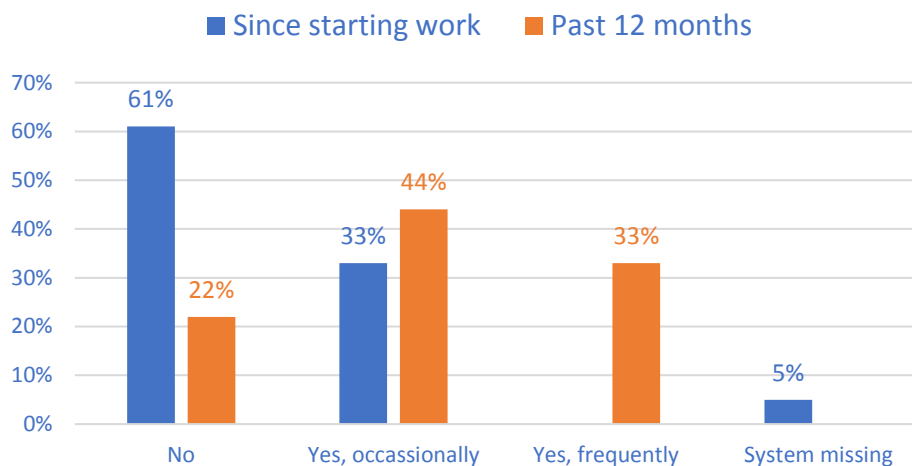
- Supporting family
- Delayed payment: working a week in arrears, being paid by cheque and waiting for the cheque to clear
- Accounting errors
- Travel expenses during the first week of work before finding more economical ways to travel
- Paying debts coupled with emergency tax in the beginning

8 people had debts at the start of work. By the time of interview, 2 people had cleared their debts.

“When I start work, I was owing €530 and every week another €90 so when I clear I already paid maybe €1,000 euros. I pay the debts in 7 weeks.”

“I feel I'm free now. I had €1500 debt from a car.”

Run Short of Money



Over 50% (n.10) of people were also affected by emergency tax, which could significantly reduce wages.

“I earned less than the social welfare because of the emergency tax.”

“My salary wasn't enough to live [after emergency tax] but I didn't complain.”

There were mixed reports about how easy or difficult it was for people to regularise their tax situation.

“It was not so easy because it is 40% but everything I do online so it was sorted out within four weeks or so. I already ask for refund and it was done already at the beginning of this year, within two or three days. Taxation is very well organised, it's OK.”

“I was paying emergency tax for nine weeks solid.”

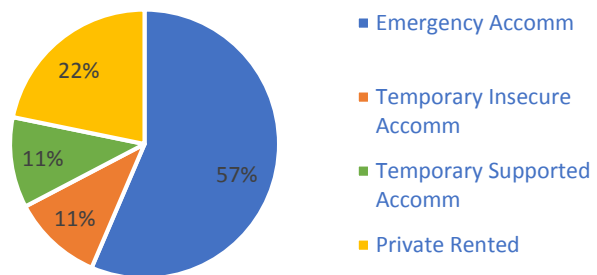
“And I never got my taxes back. I rang Revenue two weeks after I start work. So a week after I was already on normal taxes and they told me takes about two weeks to get all the emergency taxes back. It’s now the fourth week and I never got my taxes back.”

Accommodation

At the start of work, 68% (n.12) of participants were staying in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation:

- 57% (n.10) were in emergency accommodation and
- 11% (n.2) in temporary insecure accommodation.

Accommodation at Start of Work



By the time of interview participants in emergency or temporary insecure accommodation had decreased to 45% (n.8):

- 28% (n.5) were in emergency accommodation and
- 17% (n.3) in temporary insecure accommodation.

The reduction in the number of people in emergency accommodation came about through the following 5 moves:

- 1 move to private rented accommodation
- 1 move to social / affordable housing
- 2 moves to temporary supported housing,
- 1 move to temporary insecure accommodation (a friend’s accommodation was available for one week).

Securing employment did not contribute directly to the move from emergency accommodation to private rented housing – this move occurred a number of weeks after the participant’s employment ended.

Securing employment did not contribute to the move to social / affordable housing – the offer of housing was made prior to the person securing employment.

Among the two people who moved to temporary supported housing, one person was employed at the time and the other person’s temporary contract ended before the move; it’s not clear if employment (current or recent) was an influencing factor.

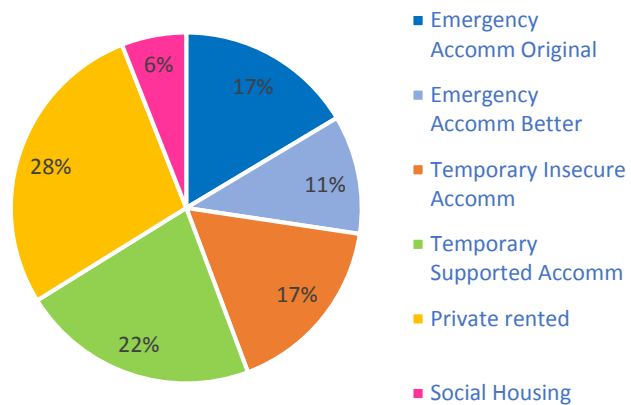
Among the five people who remained in emergency accommodation, two moved within the emergency accommodation system, which they found to be an improvement; one moved from a dorm to a single room and another moved from an emergency shelter to private emergency accommodation (B&B room on an emergency basis).

Between starting work and the time of interview, 8 people noted changes in their accommodation (this includes 2 moves within the emergency accommodation system).

6 moves were positive:

- 1 person moved from an emergency B&B to social / affordable housing
- 1 person moved from an emergency shelter to private rented accommodation
- 2 people moved from an emergency shelter to supported housing
- 2 people moved within the emergency accommodation system, which they found to be an improvement. (1 person moved from an emergency shelter to an emergency B&B and 1 person moved from a dorm in an emergency shelter to a single room in the same shelter).

Accommodation at Time of Interview



“I was in the sharing room for men and then I start work and they gave me a single room. Somebody was snoring, somebody was coming in drunk and you have to get up at 5 o clock in the morning to go to work. But once you have your own room, it’s much better. There one week working and after that they gave me my own room.”

2 moves were disruptive:

- 1 person moved from one form of temporary insecure housing to another. He had a long, physically challenging commute from his new accommodation to work and although he was doing well at work, the commute was unsustainable, and he resigned from work.
- 1 person experienced a number of moves in the three months between starting work and the time of interview. Over the course of the three months, this participant stayed in emergency accommodation, tourist hostels, at a friend’s accommodation and slept rough.

The Challenges in the Early Days:

Participants faced challenges both in work and outside of work. Challenges were interconnected, building on and influencing each other. Such as financial issues impacting morale or lack of sleep making physical work harder.

The most common challenges relating to work in the early days concerned accommodation, finances and adapting to physically challenging work and a physically challenging commute.

Many participants referred to the first few weeks of work being the hardest, after which they began to adjust. Advice offered by participants to persevere and to push through these early weeks echoes this.

Challenges participants faced in work:

1. **Physically challenging work** and long hours, often combined with a physically challenging commute, could take its toll on the body. One participant described his hand 'blowing up like a balloon' from repetitive work, another took Paracetamol to keep back pain at bay. Participants acknowledged that the first few weeks were the hardest, until the body adjusted.
2. **Errors and delays with pay** were reported at two places of work, leading to ongoing dialogue and mounting frustration.
3. **Poor morale** was created in some workplaces through abrasive management styles, language barriers and the intensity of the work.
4. **Extra responsibility without extra pay**, as experienced by three participants, caused frustration. All three were employed in physically demanding, low skilled work and pay was a key reward.
5. **Understanding appropriate workplace behaviour.** One participant was distracted by personal matters and reported using his phone considerably during the working day. He recognised this however and apologised. Another participant reacted in frustration to a pay discrepancy and started attending work on ad hoc days.
6. **Adapting to new routines / systems** – many participants hit the ground running, but some took a few weeks to get up speed with their new work.
7. **Inadequate food** due to short breaks was experienced by employees at one place of work.

Challenges participants faced outside of work

1. Noise and disturbance and consequent lack of peace and lack of sleep were a significant challenge for people staying in **emergency accommodation**. Emergency shelter opening hours also affected one participant's ability to get to work. Two participants in private

rented also found their accommodation to be detrimental to their mental well-being on account of noise and harassment.

2. Related to accommodation, **the timing of moves** posed a challenge. For one participant this posed a practical challenge – he experienced a clash between starting work and moving to independent housing. As he said, *“it all happened too fast”*, causing stress and contributing to his decision to resign. For another participant, it was a mental challenge - he felt disappointed and somewhat demotivated when he was in employment and doing his best to secure private rented accommodation, yet still stuck in emergency accommodation.
3. The first few weeks in work were particularly hard **financially** with many experiencing reduced pay due to emergency tax and some experiencing delayed pay due to one company’s policy of payment by cheque.
4. In addition to reduced and delayed pay, **other financial challenges** experienced by participants included budgeting issues (repaying debts while on emergency tax and managing a wage greater than social welfare), travel costs in first few weeks and reduced pay due to accounting or banking errors or delays.
5. A clash of work and **pressing personal matters** caused considerable stress for three participants, indicating the importance of considering timing when returning to work.
6. Many participants experienced **long, physically challenging commutes** to and from work, with a physically demanding job in between. As with physical work, the initial effect was fatigue but participants noted how the body adjusted.
7. **Adapting to an early rise** took some getting used to and was made all the more challenging when in a shared room or dorm.
8. Due to a 12-hour shift and a commute each side of work, one participant **missed out on family time** – his child was often asleep before he left for work and when he returned.

The Positives in the Early Days

“The biggest positive thing that happened in my life is this job”.

The positives at this point are mostly psychological. There are also social, financial and health benefits.

Psychological

1. **Hope and optimism** - the very offer of a job can give hope and boost confidence.

“I felt as proud as punch. I felt like everything is coming into play - there is hope out there. There is someone there to give me a chance to go and work.”

2. **Changing identity** - some people comment on a shift in their identity from someone dependent on social welfare to someone in employment who identify as productive and contributing to society. This can be a step towards feeling a part of society, to feeling ‘normal’ - an aspiration expressed by many.

“Now when I recognise some face in the crowd, I remember that I was so ashamed about myself that I tried to not meet face-to-face. I was afraid of simple question ‘Hello, how are you? What are you doing?’ So now I’m not afraid. If someone asks me ‘What are you doing?’ I have a great answer. And I’m sure that when my children ask, ‘what are you doing for life?’ the answer will be easier. Money, because I worked – not just because I existed.”

3. **Improved self-image** is noted in participants feelings of achievement and pride, of feeling valued and of changing identity. One participant highlights how the experience of homelessness can erode self-confidence and how the offer of a job sparked a recognition of value in him:

“Being homeless for me was proof that I’m worthless. Instead of feeling useless, lack of any skills, no self-esteem – instead of that I started to feel probably there is some value inside of me if someone offers me a job. It was impossible to offer me on labour market because my self-esteem was very bad even though I have a lot of work experience.”

Even among participants that did not sustain work, there is evidence of feelings of pride for what they achieved:

“There are a lot of positive. I never think that I would be able to do such a physical job and I did 200% because I had back ache, I was hungry, I was thirsty but I’m proud of myself. I gave it up - but I’m proud because at least I tried as much as I could.”

4. **Feeling purposeful / Meaningful occupation** - Homelessness is a very disempowering experience for many people. Boredom and lack of purpose can take hold. A commonly cited

positive impact of working was the effects of meaningful occupation – of “doing something” and “feeling useful”.

“Satisfaction that you're not wasting your time, you're not wasting your life, you're doing something. I think if it was even the same money I would be receiving on the dole but it's more satisfaction when you're going to work. When I was on the dole, it was like I'm a healthy young man, it was kinda a shame for yourself. But now, I'm feeling more satisfied now.”

One person also commented on enjoying the well-earned relaxation that follows productivity:

“Getting a break - getting out in the mornings and being busy. Because when you get back ...I was kind of more relaxed and I was saying ‘Sure look, I have nothing to do now, I can go back and watch television, make something, peace and quiet’. That's what used to keep me going to be honest with ya like.”

Social

5. Enjoying a social outlet: Enjoying good morale

Over three-quarters of participants said they were getting on well with colleagues. Many expressed gratitude for their colleagues and the camaraderie of working with people.

Such interaction can combat isolation, often experienced by people who are homeless, but as described below, also experienced by people in housing:

“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.”

Participants also describe the joy of inclusion and of feeling part of a group:

“The upside of the work is the rest of the staff - I love the people there. We created this group thing, you know. It can be fun.”

“Deadly, all of them are. I got on really well with the Polish boys. We had our own little communication going on.”

Health

6. **Help to manage alcohol use** - 7 people reported alcohol, drugs or gambling as having a considerably negative impact (rated 10 out of 10) in the past 12 months. One person from this group credited work with helping to maintain sobriety.

“I felt I was more relaxed, it helped me with my sleep. I used to be wrecked like. And it stopped me from drinking. It basically did like.”

7. **Help to manage mental health** - Work is clearly having a positive impact on many participant's mental health as illustrated through people's changing identity, improved self-image, meaningful occupation and expressions of hope and optimism, enjoyment and satisfaction, as detailed above. Participants also expressed how work can 'clear the head' and stave off depression.

"You start working and that's just it, you know. No stupid thinking when you're working. Usually people when they get depressed most, when they sitting and doing nothing."

"It helps you clear your head. And keeps you busy - people need to be busy. And I like to be busy as well."

Participants' own rating of their mental health also shows a 28% improvement from the last 12 months to the time of interview, with 72% at the time of interview rating their mental health as good or very good.

Financial

8. **Improved finances and seeing progress** - While financial issues could be a source of significant stress, all participants reported being in a better financial position as a result of their employment. People expressed satisfaction about paying off debts. Money is not a motivation in and of itself, it's what money can bring that matters to people.

"To pay my debts. I feel I'm free now. I had €1500 debt from a car."

Best and Hardest parts of starting work

Participants were asked to identify the best and hardest parts of starting work.

Hardest Part

All the jobs were physically demanding to some extent (none were sedentary) and getting used to the physicality of work was the most commonly referenced 'hardest part' of people's work. This physical work was often combined with a physically challenging commute. Good sleep and nutrition would be important for sustaining such physical demands, but some people were not eating properly (because of short breaks or emergency shelter facilities) and some people's sleep was disturbed by noise (in both emergency and private rented accommodation).

Other 'hardest parts' included:

- adapting to new routines – in work, in terms of getting up to speed quickly with new systems and processes and out of work, in terms of an early rise
- coping with the repetitive nature of the work
- poor morale
- not seeing one's child because of long working hours and a long commute
- wrong timing - the clash of starting work and moving into housing

Best Part

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

Other 'best parts' included

- the practical benefits of money such as being able to repay debts, support family and generally 'start to live'.
- a positive and supportive work environment and positive relations with colleagues.

Supports

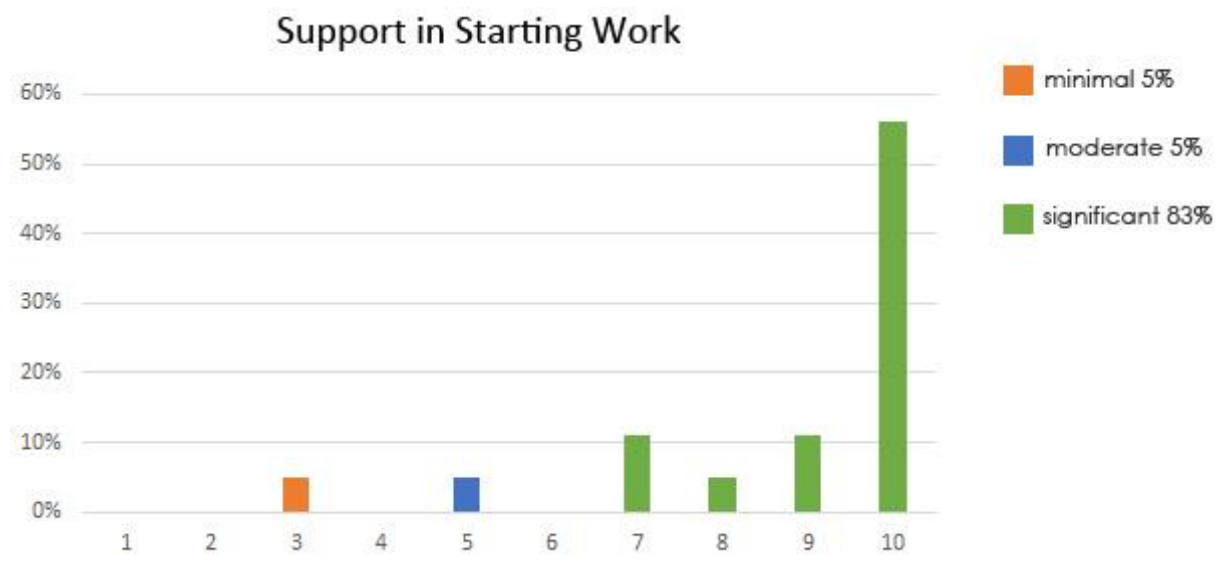
Support from Emergency Shelter staff:

- Woke one participant for weeks until he became accustomed to the early rise
- Facilitated moves from a shared dorm to single room and from a shared room to an emergency bed in a B&B.
- Organised food outside of regular hours
- Organised clothes for work

Participants were very grateful for these small acts which made a big difference to their ability to work.

Support from Employment and Training Team

Asked to rate how supported they felt starting work on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all supported and 10 being very supported, 83% of participants rated the support as significant. Support ranged from pre-work preparation to check-in phone calls to ongoing advice and support to sourcing extra training.



One participant describes the support and positivity he received pre-work which encouraged him to take the next step towards employment:

“Our self-esteem is poor because of period of life without job. Everything was too difficult because I was under huge stress because of previous unsuccessful interviews so I decided ‘do not try because it will... not kill me but... ok in short... atmosphere in this place (Employment & Training office) was so positive, I feel so much support that my imagination about my possibilities grow up. As result of that I can imagine I can go anywhere and ask for a job. It was too difficult and stressful for me a few months ago – now I feel I could do it.”

Another participant struggled in the first two weeks and describes the benefit of the support he received:

“I got a hell of a lot of support off Fiona and Don. I talk to Don every third day. He seems to be giving me as much advice as possibly he can and that helps. It helps an awful lot. It's handy having someone like Don in your corner.”

Reflecting on a time when a previous job ended, another participant describes how on-going contact and awareness on the part of the Employment and Team supported him:

“Two months without money after this job, so I get small bit depressed but again, Fiona and Don, catch me again.”

Support from Employers

For the most part, participants found employers to be approachable, supportive and flexible – and this was much appreciated.

“If you have a problem, they're trying to do their best to help you, to sort it straight away.”

“Great people. They don't put pressure. Physical job it's important that you're not under pressure. Bad enough that it's a physical job.”

Specific examples of support included:

- The accountant at one participant's place of work organised an advance for him when he found himself on emergency tax.
- A manager agreed to permit an employee to start late so as to tie-in with the opening hours of her emergency accommodation.

Advice from participants

The following quotes were taken from participants' answers to the question, "What advice would you give to someone who's supported by the Employment & Training Team and is about to start work?" in the second round of interviews. The quotes below are included as the advice reflects on the early days in work.

"For anybody coming in at the first, just stick with it, it will get better. No matter how bad it looks at the moment, it will turn around, just give it a bit of time."

"Do not give up. It is always hard at the beginning. After that it gets easier. If it's quite difficult at the beginning, just keep going, keep going, keep going - it might be difficult for a couple of weeks but after that you will get more used to it and it will sort it out for you. Not to give up, I would say."

"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."

"After two weeks you'll hit a patch and you'll find it difficult - just stick with it and that'll pass through because it takes a while to adjust... to get into the work ethic again, particularly being on time and having to obey orders sometimes. You'll be on a high and then reality kinda sinks in then. It's kinda your body is adjusting to the work routine again you see. And you might hit a kind of a slump for a week or two, but then you get over that and if you're going to be happy with the job you know you're going to continue with it and then you're like right I'm here and everything is fine. Ok, like every other job in life there'll be issues pop up every now and then and you'll bitch and moan like the rest of them but the majority of the time it's good."

"Every day is better."

Interim Recommendations for the Early Days in Work

The following recommendations are based on the first phase of the research only. They may be revised as new information comes to light as the research continues.

1. Pre-employment support should incorporate the following:
 - a. Explore whether it is the **right time personally** for someone to start work, or whether there are other significant life factors at play that may impact negatively on the person's ability to commence work effectively. If such factors are currently at play, they could make the transition to work stressful and ultimately make the work unsustainable. Staying in emergency accommodation is the exception to this, however. While it is a significant challenge to start work while in emergency accommodation and could be considered 'the wrong time', employment can in theory offer a route out of emergency accommodation. The alternative - to stay in emergency accommodation and delay starting work until housing is secured – could, with the housing crisis²², take a considerable amount of time, and long stays in emergency accommodation are detrimental to well-being (Finnerty, 2018).
 - b. Establish a **timeline for expectations** to allay potential disappointment and demotivation. Independent housing (a goal for the majority of participants) may take some time to achieve. Psychological benefits of working however, are felt quite early on.
 - c. Advice on the importance of **good nutrition**, especially when employed in physically demanding work. Explore how this can be managed when staying in emergency accommodation, without access to a kitchen (see 5 also).
 - d. Explore options for **travelling** to work, balancing financial and energy expenditure.
 - e. Provide **financial planning advice**, covering expenditure on food and travel and most especially, advice concerning emergency tax - determining in advance if someone will be affected by it, advising on how to regularise tax and in the interim, explore and advise on how to budget for this lower income, looking in particular at debt repayment and rent.
2. Employee mentoring should be available to all new employees for their first month in a new job at a minimum.
3. Explore options with employers to offer financial supports to new employees while waiting for emergency tax to be regularised.
4. Staying in emergency accommodation and starting work is identified as a significant challenge. Support offered by emergency shelter staff to people starting employment made a positive impact on their ability to work. Further research, involving both people in

²² The Simon Communities in Ireland's most recent Locked Out of the Market report found that over 3 consecutive days in April 2019 there was an average of just 27 properties available to rent in Cork City Centre.

employment and staying in emergency accommodation and emergency shelter staff, is recommended to explore how this group of people could be further supported, especially in the critical early weeks of work.

Appendix

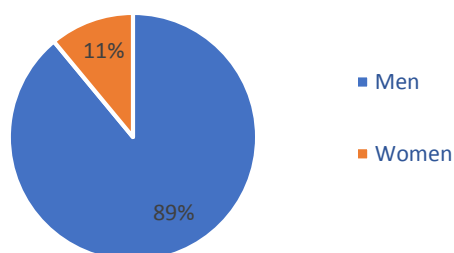
Participants

KEY ASPECTS:

- 89% (n. 16) were men and 11% (n.2) women. The mean age was 39 years. 72% were non-Irish nationals.
- 56% were currently homeless and staying in **emergency accommodation** as they commenced work. 11% were in temporary insecure accommodation and could be considered at risk of homelessness. 11% were in temporary supported accommodation and 22% were in private rented accommodation as they started work.
- 61% have experienced **long-term homelessness**. Participant's experiences of homelessness varied between being 'at risk of homelessness' and being homeless for eight or more years.
- **Relationship breakdown** was the most common reason for participants losing their last accommodation. But for most, a web of factors leads to homelessness.
- Participants reported being in **good physical health** and **moderate mental health**:
 - 89% rated their physical health as good/very good in the past 12 months and 11% rated it as ok.
 - Mental health rating was lower - 55% rated their mental health as good/ very good over the past 12 months, 34% reported it as ok and 11% as poor/very poor.
- 55% indicated **significant issues with either alcohol, drugs or gambling** in the past 12 months, rating its negative impact in their lives over the past 12 months as between 7 and 10 out of 10.
- 39% are '**in recovery**' – they rated alcohol, drugs or gambling's negative impact in their lives over the past 12 months as 10 out of 10 but they currently abstain. This may make them vulnerable, but it also shows their strength and the progress they have made.
- **Problematic alcohol use** was the most common out of problematic alcohol, drug and gambling in the past among the group. 50% indicated **significant issues** with alcohol, rating its negative impact in their lives in the past 12 months as between 7 and 10 out of 10.
- 39% had **debts** at the start of work. This can be a challenge for people as they move into work.
- A significant majority indicate good levels of **confidence and self-worth**.
- The majority have **recent** experience of **skilled or semi-skilled work**:
 - All but 1 person had **worked previously** with over three-quarters working **all or most of their lives**.
 - Two-thirds worked in the last 12 months, however the remaining third are **long-term unemployed** which brings its own challenges.
 - 56% of people's most recent experience of work was **skilled or semi-skilled work**.

Demographics

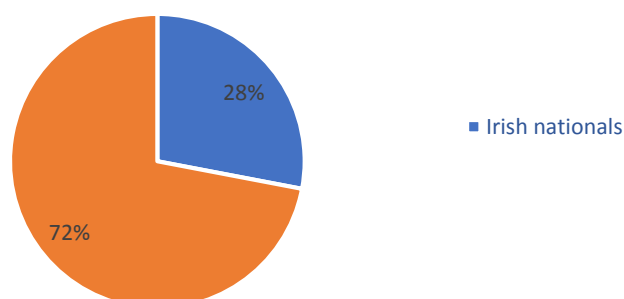
Gender



89% (n. 16) of participants were men / 11% (n.2) women.

This is a slightly lower representation of women compared to the gender breakdown among all Cork Simon service users and among service users of the Employment and Training Programme where women account for 17% in both cases. (Keeping Count, 2018 and Employment & Training Project Operations Report 2017).

Nationality



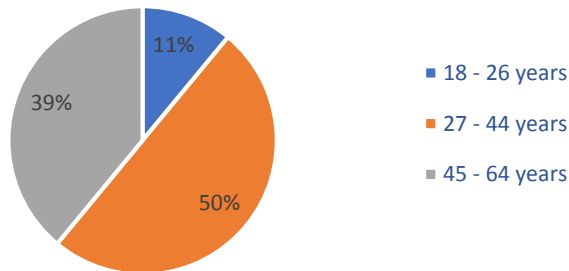
28% (n.5) of participants were Irish nationals / 72% (n.13) were non-Irish nationals.

This is a much higher representation of non-Irish nationals compared to the nationality breakdown among all Cork Simon users where non-Irish nationals account for 22% and among service users of the Employment and Training Programme where non-Irish nationals account for 41%. (Keeping Count, 2016 & Employment and Training Project Operations Report 2017)

Full breakdown of nationalities: 28% (n.5) were Irish / 6% (n.1) UK / 56% (n.10) other EU28 countries / 11% (n.2) rest of world.

10 different nationalities were represented. Irish (28% n.5) and Polish (28% n.5) were the most frequently recorded nationalities. (The other 8 nationalities were represented by 1 person each).

Age Groups

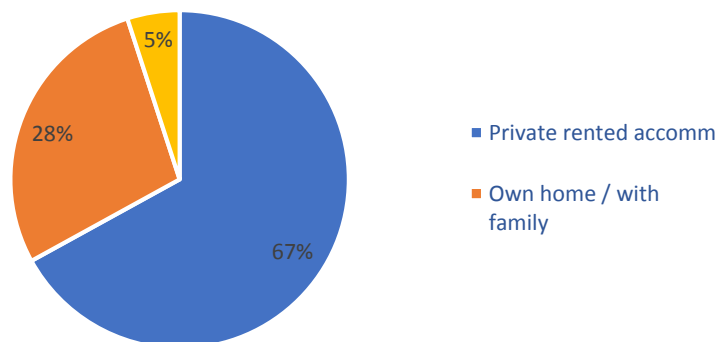


Participants ages ranged between 20 and 54 years. The mean age was 39 years.

Age is broadly in line with all Cork Simon users, however there is a higher representation of 45-64 year olds in the participant group compared to the general Cork Simon population where 18-26 year olds account for 15% of service users, 27-44 year olds account for 47% and 45-64 year olds account for 25%. (Keeping Count, 2018).

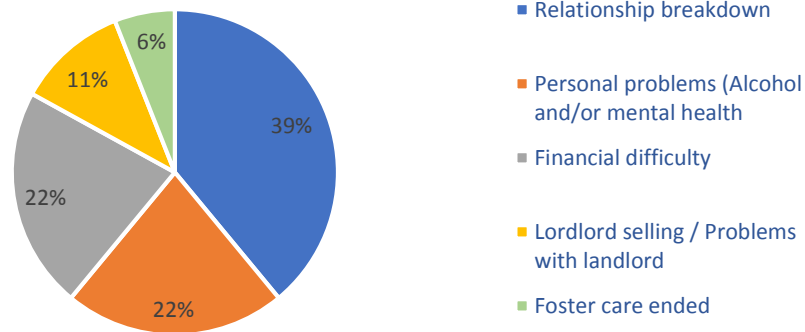
Housing & Homelessness

Last Accommodation



Before becoming homeless, over two-thirds lived in private rented accommodation, over a quarter lived with family or in their own home and one person lived with a foster family.

Reasons last accommodation ended



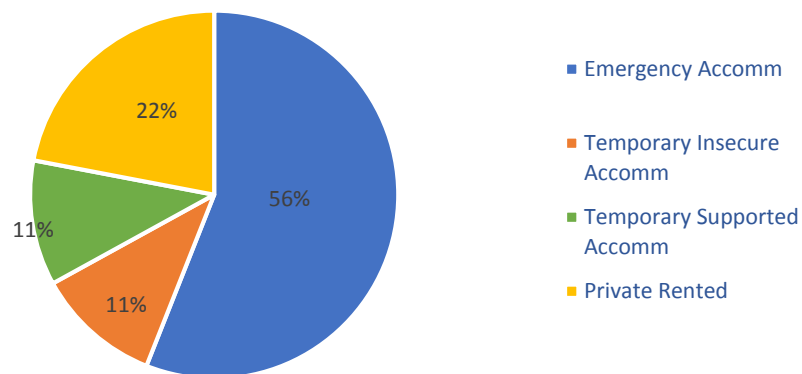
In most cases, the reasons for people losing their last accommodation are complex. It was rare that a single issue lead to homelessness; for many people a number of related factors contributed to them losing their accommodation.

Two participants expressed how this culmination of factors weighted them down and caused anguish:

“Every piece of life was too difficult for me”

“Work gone. My wife gone. I break my car on black ice. For me it [housing] wasn't important at that moment. Too much on my mind.”

Accommodation at Start of Work

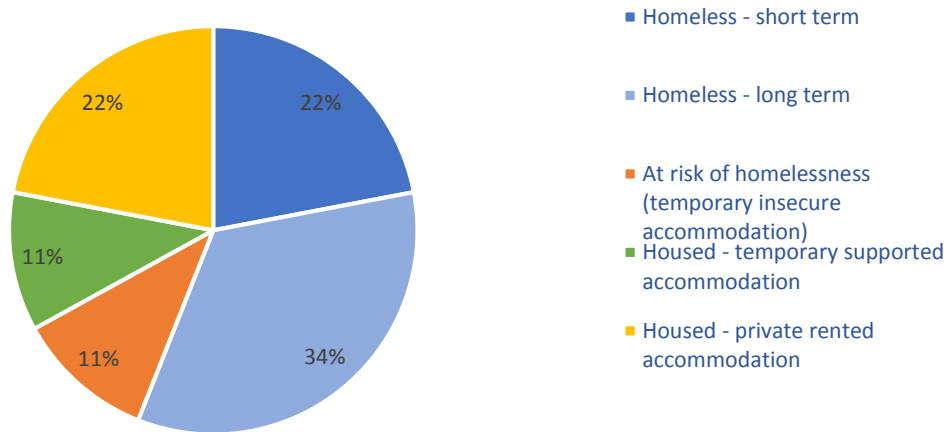


As they started work, more than half of people (56%, n.10) were staying in emergency accommodation. 11% (n.2) were in temporary insecure accommodation²³, 11% (n.2) were in temporary supported accommodation²⁴ and 22% (n.4) were in private rented accommodation.

²³ A short-term let and staying with a partner’s family.

²⁴ Offered by Cork Simon.

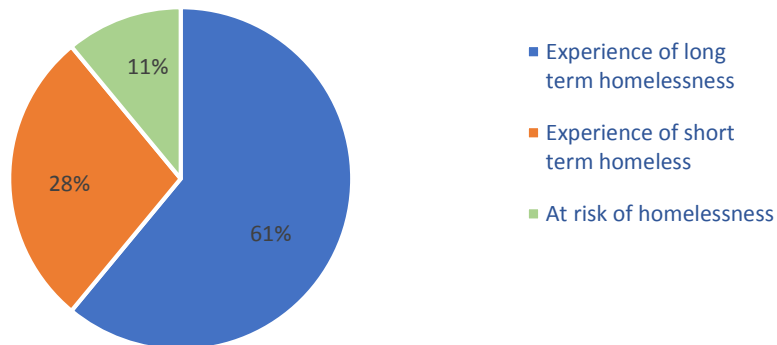
Housed / Homeless at Start of Work



Among the 10 people staying in emergency accommodation, 4 were short-term homeless (22% of participants) and 6 were long-term homeless (34% of participants) as they started work.

The 2 people staying in temporary insecure accommodation could be considered to be at risk of homelessness.

Experience of Homelessness



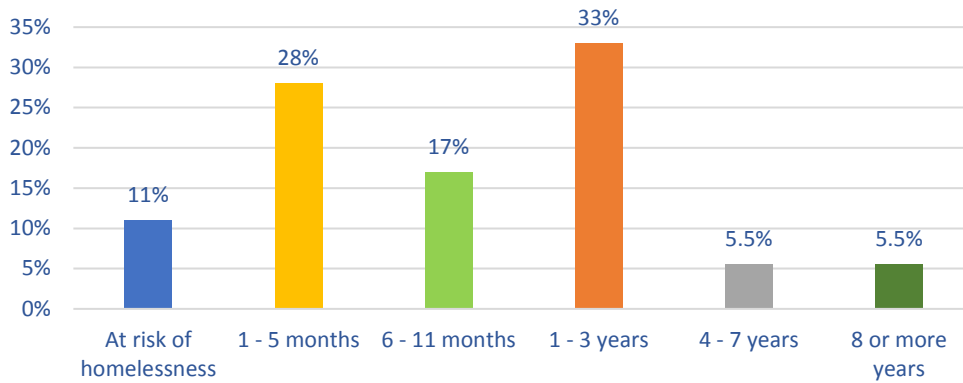
The majority, 61% (n.11), had been or were currently long term homeless²⁵.

28% (n.5) had been or were currently short term homeless.

11% (n.2) were staying in temporary insecure accommodation and could be considered to be at risk of homelessness.

²⁵ Long term homelessness is defined by Government as continuous or episodic stays of 6 months or more in emergency accommodation.

Experience of Homelessness - further breakdown



The length of time people had experienced homelessness varied between being ‘at risk of homelessness’ (11% / n.2) and being homeless for eight or more years (5% / n.1).

Non-Irish Nationals tended to have been homeless for longer. 62% of Non-Irish Nationals had been homeless for 1 year or more. By contrast, all Irish nationals had either been homeless less than a year or were at risk of homelessness.

Experience of homelessness among people in housing as they start work:

4 people were in private rented accommodation and 2 people were in temporary supported accommodation as they started work. Their most recent experiences of homelessness varied between 6 months and 2 years past.

PRIVATE RENTED

#3	Housed 6 weeks	STH prior to this
#2	Housed 9 months	STH prior to this
#4	Housed 2 years	LTH prior to this
#1	Housed 2 years approx.	LTH prior to this

TEMP SUPPORTED ACCOMM

#1	Housed 6 months	LTH prior to this
#2	Housed 1.5 years	LTH prior to this

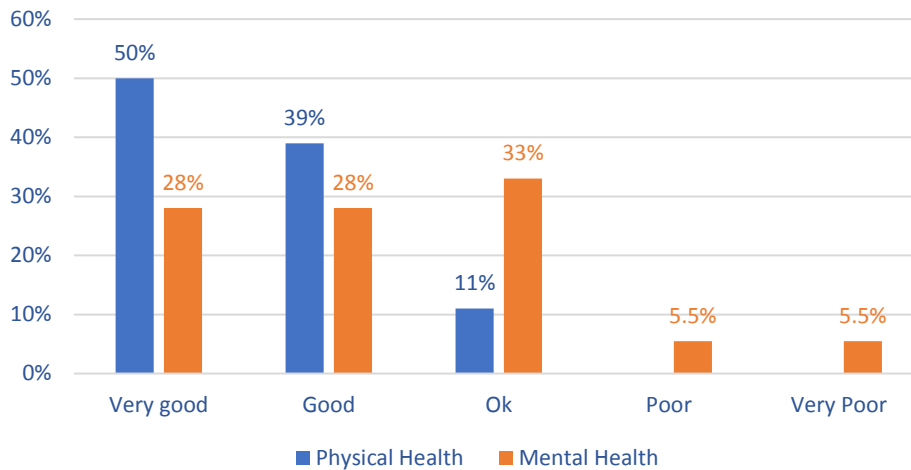
Health

Participants were asked to rate their physical and mental health over the past 12 months from very good to very poor.

Physical health is rated particularly well with 89% rating it as good or very good and the remaining 11% rating it as ok.

Mental health is not rated as high; 56% rated their mental health good or very good but a sizeable 44% rated their mental health only ok, poor or very poor over the past 12 months.

Health over past 12 months



Physical and mental health appears to be better among the participant group than among the general Cork Simon population. A 2010 Cork Simon survey found 49% of service users had a physical health condition and 66% had a mental health condition. (Homelessness Makes You Sick: A Health Snapshot Study, 2010)

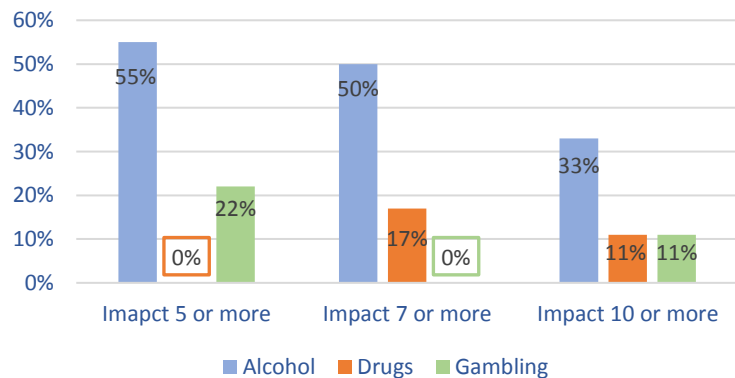
Problem Alcohol use / Drug use / Gambling

Past Use

Using a scale of 1 - 10, people were asked to gauge the negative impact of alcohol, drugs and gambling on their lives in the past 12 months, with 1 representing no impact and 10 representing maximum negative impact.

Alcohol was most commonly used and 50% (n.9) of participants rated its negative impact on their lives in the past 12 months as 7 or more out of 10. 33% (n.6) rated its negative impact as 10 out of 10.

Impact of Alcohol, Drugs & Gambling in past 12 months

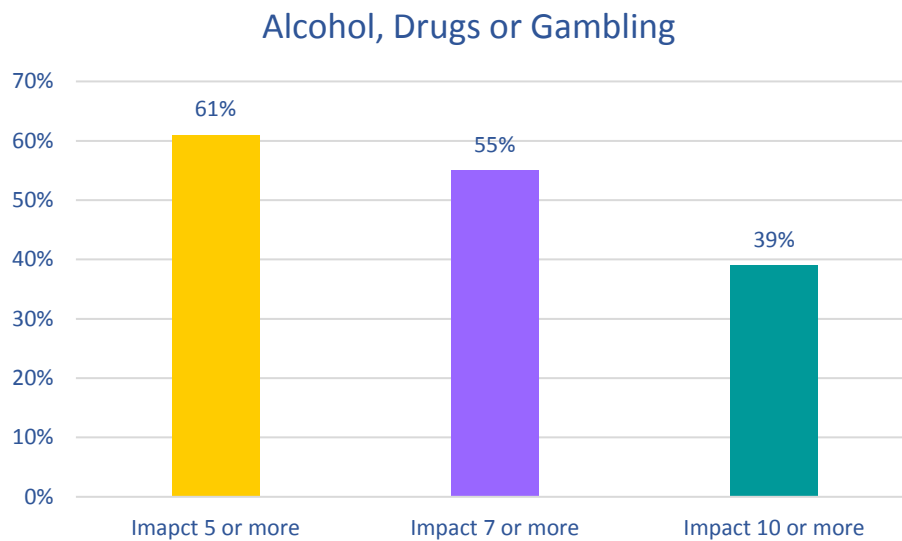


Drugs and gambling were in less common use but the reported negative impact was proportionate to that of alcohol.

17% (n.3) of participants rated the negative impact of drugs on their lives in the past 12 months as 7 or more out of 10 and 11% (n.2) rated it as 10 out of 10.

11% (n.2) of participants also rated the negative impact of gambling in their lives as 10 out of 10.

When alcohol, drugs and gambling are combined, 55% (n.10) reported one of these as having a negative impact of 7 or more out of 10 and 39% (n.7) reported one of these as having a negative impact of 10 out of 10.



Change in use

Alcohol

3 people (17%) reported a negative impact of between 7 and 9 out of 10.	All 3 still use alcohol.
6 people (33%) reported a negative impact of 10 out of 10.	5 no longer use alcohol. 1 still uses alcohol.

Drugs

1 person (5.5%) reported a negative impact of between 7 and 9 out of 10.	This person no longer uses drugs
2 people (11%) reported a negative impact of 10 out of 10.	None now use drugs.

Gambling

2 people (11%) reported a negative impact of 10 out of 10.	None now gamble.
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Combined

7 people (n.39%) reported either alcohol, drugs or gambling as having a negative impact of 10 out of 10.	<p>4 people used one of the three (alcohol, drugs or gambling). None now use.</p> <p>3 people used two of the three (alcohol, drugs or gambling):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2 people no longer use either. ○ 1 person no longer uses drugs but still use alcohol.
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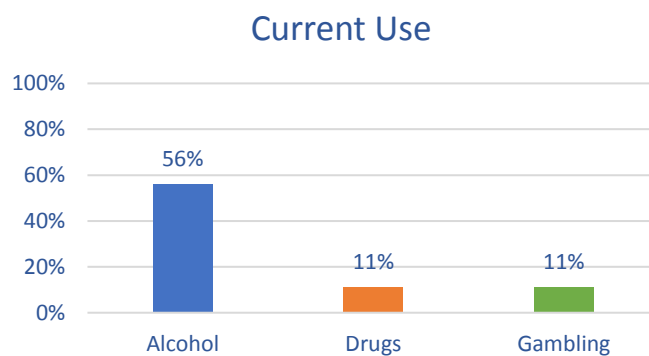
Abstinence and current use

Abstinence:

The 7 people, 39% of participants, who reported either alcohol, drugs or gambling's negative impact in the past 12 months as 10 out of 10, but who no longer use, can be considered to be in recovery. This may make them vulnerable but may also demonstrate their strength.

Current use – Alcohol:

10 people still use alcohol. 6 of them rated its negative impact in the past 12 months as between 1 and 5. Concerningly, the remaining 4 people (22% of participants) who still use alcohol, rated its negative impact as between 7 and 10 out of 10.



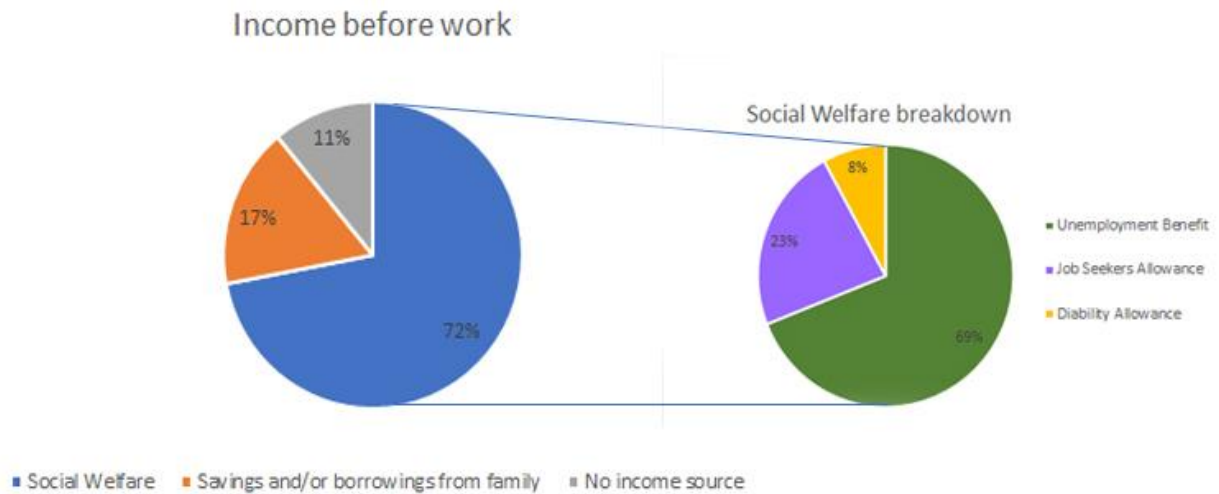
Current use – Drugs:

The 2 people who use drugs rated its negative impact in the past 12 months as between 1 and 3.

Current use – Gambling

The 2 people who gamble both rated its negative impact in the past 12 months as 1.

Personal Finances

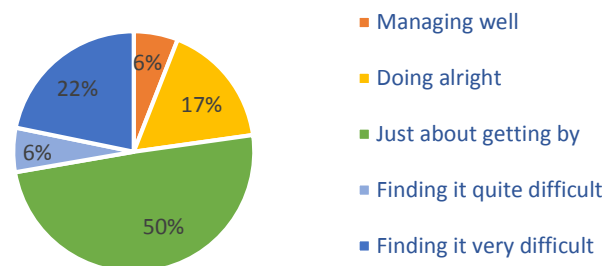


Before work, 72% (n.13) were reliant on social welfare - the majority through Unemployment Benefit, a small number through Job Seekers and one person through Illness Benefit.

The remainder relied on savings and/or borrowing from family (17%) or had no income source (11%).

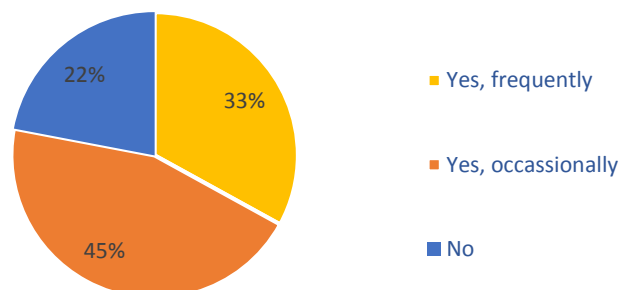
50% (n.9) of participants reported they were 'just about getting by' over the past 12 months while over a quarter (28% n.5) reported they were finding it quite or very difficult. Under a quarter (22% n.4) said they were managing their money well or doing alright.

Managing money past 12 months



Echoing the above report that over three-quarters were either just about getting by or finding it difficult, over three quarters (78% n. 14) also reported running short of money frequently or occasionally in the last 12 months.

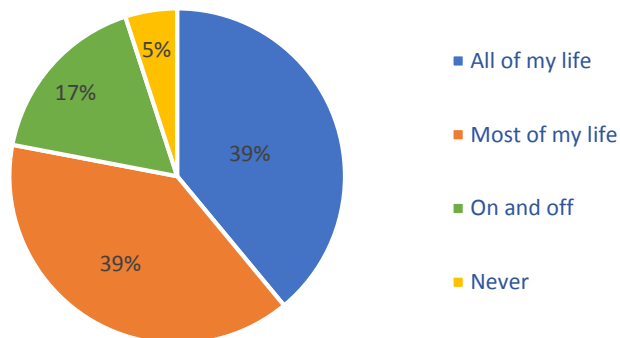
Short of money during the past 12 months



39% (n.7) had debts at the time they started work.

Work History

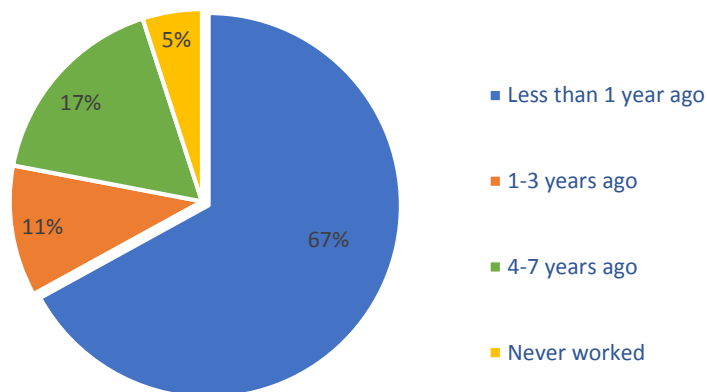
Worked Before



A significant majority, 78% (n.14) had worked all or most of their lives and a further 17% (n.3) had worked on and off. Just one person (a 20 year old) had never worked before.

These figures are comparable to the general Cork Simon population (Working It Out, 2012).

Last Worked

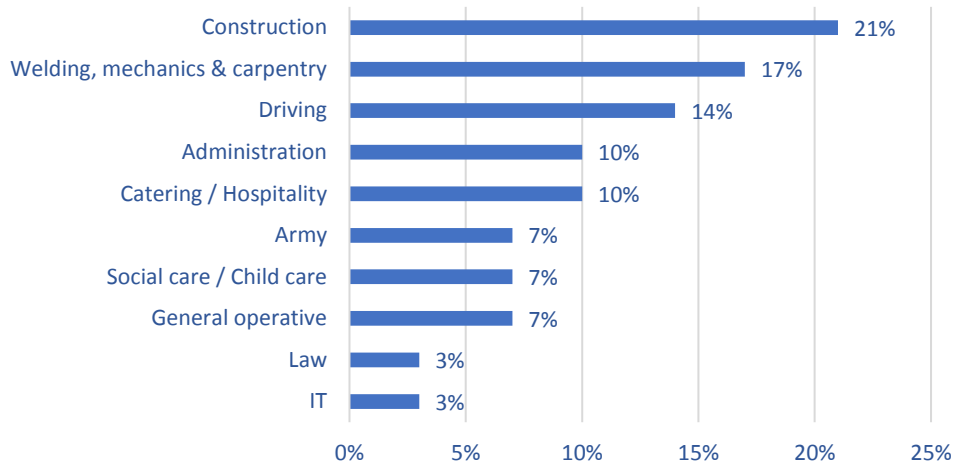


Two-thirds (67% n.12) worked within the last year. The remaining third (33% n. 6) were long term unemployed - between 1 and 7 years, with one person never having worked. All but the latter have also experienced long term homelessness.

In comparison, 92% of Cork Simon residents of working age are long term unemployed (Working It Out, 2012).

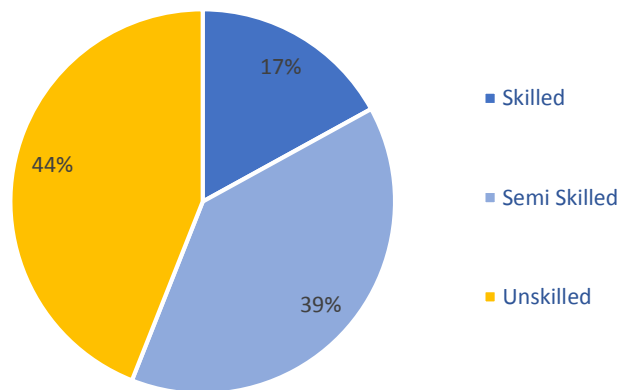
The most common area of past work experience was construction where 1 in 5 had worked.

Previous Work



People's *most recent* work experience was most commonly in the areas of Construction / Infrastructure (22%) and as General Operatives in factories and warehouses (22%).

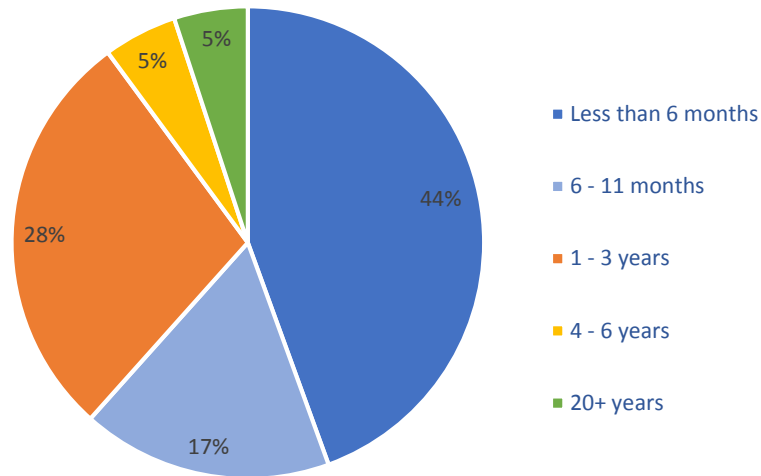
Skill level of most recent work



56% of people's most recent work experience was skilled or semi-skilled work.

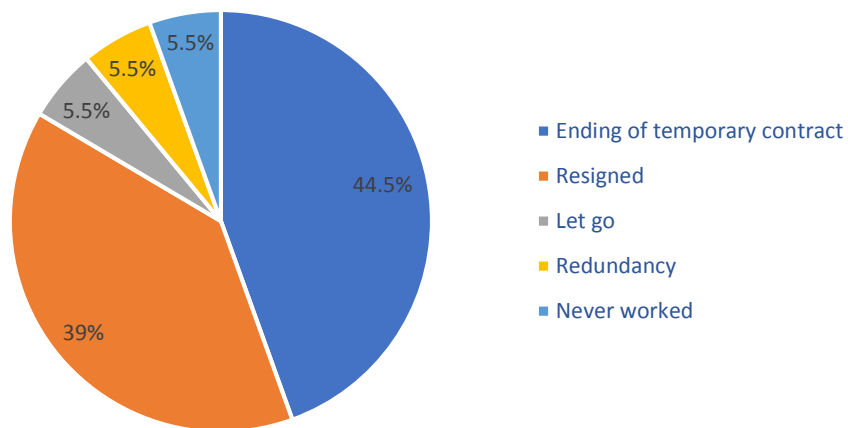
These figures are comparable to the general Cork Simon population (Working It Out, 2012).

Length of time in last job



Over 60% of participants were in their last job less than 1 year. 33% were in their last job between 1 and 6 years and one person (5%) was in his last job for over 20 years.

Reason last job ended



The main reason for participants losing their last job was the ending of a temporary contract, which was the case for 44.5%.

The next most common reason was resignation due to either personal problems (usually alcohol or mental health) or because a job was not financially viable.

One person was made redundant and one person was dismissed following a disagreement with a manager.

Confidence and self-worth



Participants were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree with the above statements exploring confidence and self-worth. The majority of participants show high levels of confidence and self-worth with high percentages agreeing / strongly agreeing with the statements.

Understandably, the statement 'I feel in control over the direction of my life' received the lowest level of agreement out of the four statements – just 11% strongly agreed and 56% agreed.

Participation in Cork Simon Employment and Training supports

- 33% (n.6) participated in Step to Work²⁶
- 50% (n.9) took part in Jobs Club²⁷
- 67% (n. 12) took part in Mentoring²⁸
- 83% (n.15) took part in Training²⁹

²⁶ 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 made unpaid work experiences illegal. The programme had to be discontinued in 2019 with the introduction of EU Legislation which made unpaid work experiences illegal.

²⁷ The Employment and Training Project runs a weekly 'Jobs Club' where attendees are supported with practical job search preparations such as conducting job searches, completing application forms, C.V. writing and interview practice.

²⁸ A formal Employment Mentoring Programme was launched in 2016 to provide employees with access to a dedicated 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.

²⁹ 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 most popular courses in 2017 were Manual Handling, Food Safety & HACCP and SafePass. (Cork Simon Community. 2017. *Employment & Training Project Operation Report*).

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