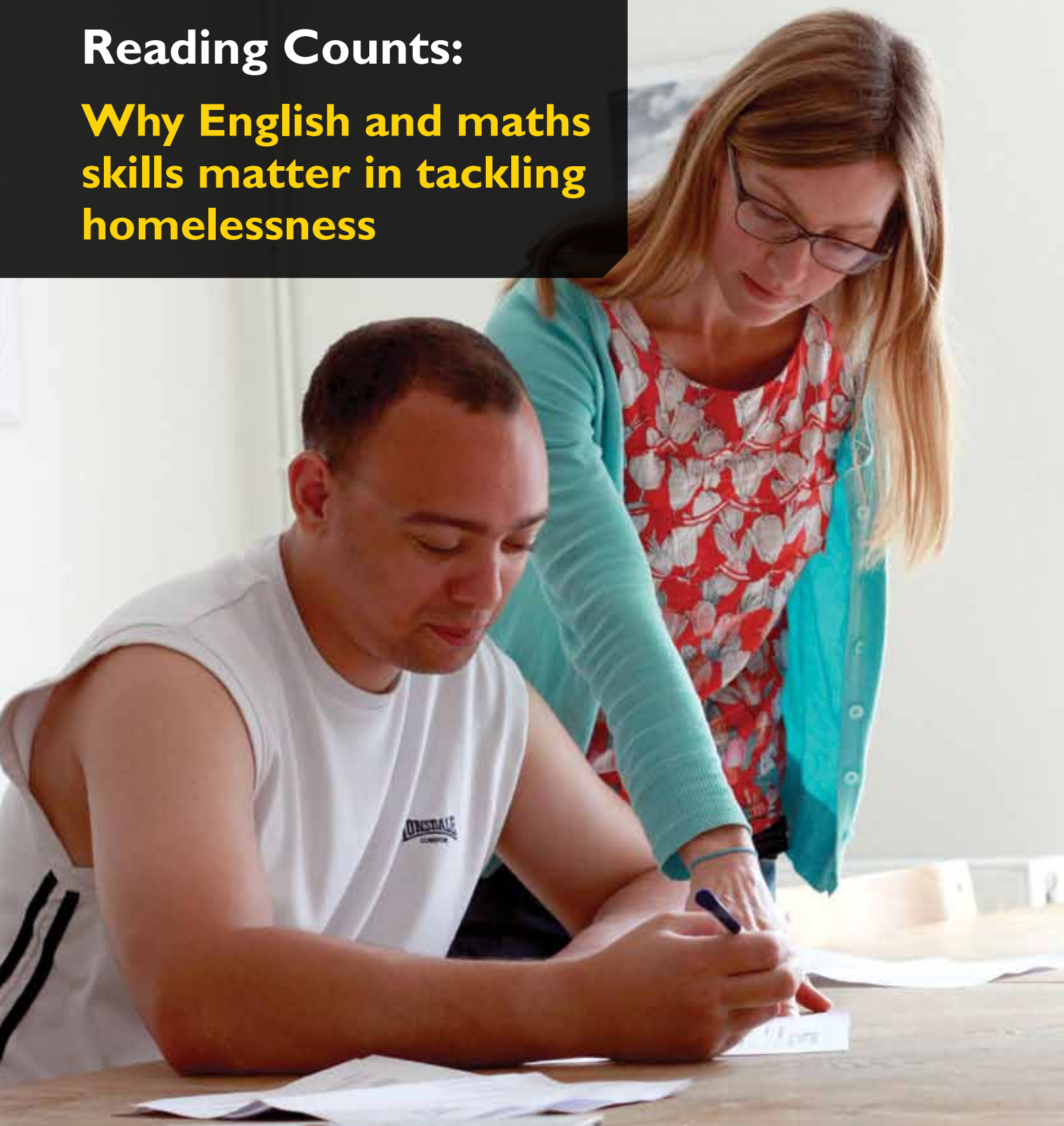


Reading Counts:

Why English and maths skills matter in tackling homelessness



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Foreword



English and maths skills are fundamental for people to be active citizens in our society. They are the bedrock upon which we are all able to find and sustain work, learn new skills, participate in our democracy, support our families and feel part of the community we live in. We know from recent surveys, that millions of adults in the UK have

low or very low English and maths skills and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) with many others is committed to finding ways to support people to improve their skills.

This report helpfully reminds us that we need to take care when we describe and think about the challenges, because the people with low level skills are not homogeneous. In this report we can see the particular issues facing people who are homeless and begin to understand how low level skills are a major barrier to their progress. The report is, rightly, careful not to presume a simple and causal link between low English and maths skills and homelessness; it is clear that people who are homeless often have many barriers to face to becoming active citizens.

What it does show eloquently is that without better access to funding and support from the education

system, many people who are homeless will face enormous uphill struggles to find and sustain work, to maintain good health, to address benefit and other issues. The recommendations rightly focus on the need for Government spending to prioritise people who are homeless and their English and maths needs. They also point to the need to design bespoke programmes to meet the needs of people who are homeless rather than general access courses which cannot easily recognise and meet their specific needs.

A major challenge for all of us is to find ways to knit together the many departments of Government and delivery organisations who need to work together to address this challenge. Equally, we must better describe the benefits to our society and reductions in costs which are so obvious to many of us but which are not manifest to those controlling budgets. Improving the skills of people who are homeless will result in many personal and societal benefits which we need to show in cash savings if we are to win the argument with Government.

I therefore welcome this report and the intelligence it adds to what we already know; I am looking forward to working with St Mungo's Broadway to engage Government in discussions about how we implement the recommendations and make a difference for people who are homeless.

David Hughes, Chief Executive – The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE)

Executive summary of findings

The extent to which people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills

- People who are homeless are considerably more likely than the general population to lack basic English skills. Skills check assessments carried out for this research suggest that 51 per cent of people who are homeless lack the basic English skills needed for everyday life (equivalent to below Level 1 on the NQF, or GCSE grade D-G), compared to 15 per cent of the adult population in England.¹
- 55 per cent of those we assessed were found to lack basic maths skills. Due to a higher prevalence of poor maths skills in the general population (49 per cent)² the gap between the maths skills of people who are homeless and that of the general population is smaller.
- This widespread lack of basic English and maths skills suggests that Government must do more to meet its commitment to 'prioritise access to further education and skills services for the most disadvantaged, including homeless people'.³

Availability of English and maths skills services that are effective for people who are homeless

- The Government funds adult English and maths training through the Adult Skills Budget (ASB). Adult Skills Budget funding places an emphasis on completing courses and qualifications. Further Education (FE) college principals suggest that people who are homeless are less likely to complete courses or gain qualifications. This often means that it is too great a financial risk for mainstream skills providers, including FE colleges, to use ASB funding to provide learning opportunities for people who are homeless.
- St Mungo's Broadway and other homelessness organisations provide specialised English and maths learning opportunities. However, it is difficult to draw on ASB funding for this type of service, which means available funding is limited and often from charitable sources.
- Housing, health and employment support services are often inappropriate for people who are homeless due to their high, and often multiple, support needs.⁴ Similarly, mainstream English and maths courses are often delivered by teachers who are not trained to teach adults with multiple support needs, such as those experienced by many people who are homeless. Mainstream courses also generally have rigid attendance requirements, are delivered at a set pace and have relatively large class sizes. These features often make it hard for people who are homeless to complete these courses.

¹ Department of Business, Innovations and Skills (2011) Skills for life survey: a survey of literacy, numeracy and IT levels in England <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey>

² Department of Business, Innovations and Skills (2011) Skills for life survey: a survey of literacy, numeracy and IT levels in England <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey>

³ HM Government (2011) Vision to end rough sleeping: No second night out nationwide https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62611/1939099.pdf

⁴ See St Mungo's (2013) No More: Homelessness through the eyes of recent rough sleepers; Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's (2012) The Programme's Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme; and St Mungo's, Homeless Link (2012) Improving hospital admission and discharge for people who are homeless. All of these publications are available on the St Mungo's Broadway website, <http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/>

“If I do miss dates [on a St Mungo’s Broadway course] we can go back over it. But if I’m on a 12 week course somewhere else and miss units and fall behind then I’m in trouble. And it would have been another failed attempt.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

- Professionals who work with people who are homeless suggest that there are often few suitable basic skills training services to which to refer their clients.

St Mungo’s Broadway staff have only been able to refer 27 per cent of clients with an identified English skills need to English training, and 33 per cent of clients who have an identified maths need to maths training.

- Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and the Prison Service are all frequently in contact with people who are homeless or who become homeless. These services are expected to identify poor English and maths skills. However, the experiences of people who are homeless suggest that they often miss opportunities to identify these skills needs.
- People who are homeless often attempt to conceal poor skills, especially poor English skills. Interviewees suggested that this is often due to feelings of embarrassment or shame. People who have experienced homelessness may be especially likely to conceal basic skills needs due to a mistrust of services and a lack of motivation to engage in learning.

Reasons why many people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills

- Many of the people who are homeless interviewed reported poor experiences of school, which meant they did not develop English and maths skills as children. This was often connected to unstable or traumatic childhoods. Previous research has found

that people who have experienced homelessness and other types of social exclusion often report having run away from home as a child, experienced violence between parents and being sexually or physically abused at home.⁵

“Physical abuse from my step father, from the age of four, beatings and stuff like that. It was quite extreme. The guy had mental health issues, sociopathic. It left me with post traumatic stress. I was traumatised as a child so in class I was seen as a disruptive kid... I was made to stand outside classrooms, made to stand in the corner.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

- Previous research has found a high prevalence of dyslexia and other learning difficulties among people who are homeless.⁶ Findings from interviews carried out for this report with people who are homeless and skills professionals suggest these conditions have often remained undiagnosed.
- The unstable living conditions experienced by people who are homeless make it difficult to commit to the time and effort needed to improve their English and maths skills. The physical hardship associated with rough sleeping can make engaging in any kind of learning extremely difficult. **Priorities around finding and securing a place to live may lead to learning being perceived as less of a priority.**
- Substance use, physical and mental ill health lead to both cognitive and practical barriers to learning. **St Mungo’s Broadway clients who lack basic English or maths skills are more likely to have a physical or mental health condition.**
- Many people who are homeless make relatively little use of English and maths skills in their everyday lives. When skills are not used they can deteriorate.⁷

⁵ Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G. and Johnsen, S. (2012) Multiple Exclusion Homelessness in the UK: An Overview of Key Findings, Briefing Paper No. 1 http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/documents/MEH_Briefing_No_1_2012.pdf

⁶ Oakes, PM., Davies, RC. (2008) Intellectual disability in homeless adults: a prevalence study, *Journal of Intellectual Disability* 12(4):325-34

⁷ Oakes, PM., Davies, RC. (2008) Intellectual disability in homeless adults: a prevalence study, *Journal of Intellectual Disability* 12(4):325-34

Consequences of lacking basic English and maths skills for people who are homeless

- **Lacking basic skills has a number of negative effects for people who are homeless, not least with regards to employment. A 2013 survey of 1,595 St Mungo's⁸ clients found that only six per cent were in paid work. Poor English and maths skills partly explain this extremely low rate of employment.** English and maths skills are increasingly required by employers and to find and apply for jobs. Reading and writing skills are also required to understand and comply with conditions attached to out of work benefits.
- **The causal link between basic English and maths skills and support needs is complex. It is likely that lacking basic English and maths skills makes it more difficult to recover from homelessness, and the multiple support needs associated with being homeless makes it harder to develop these skills.** Difficulty reading makes it harder to find somewhere to live and understand tenancy agreements. Maths skills are required to budget effectively in order to pay rent and bills in a timely manner, and will therefore become increasingly important for people on low incomes as benefits are paid directly to claimants through Universal Credit.
- Homelessness is rarely only a housing issue; individuals who are homeless are often also affected by physical health and or mental health issues. Analysis of 1,449 St Mungo's clients' recovery from homelessness found that **clients who lack basic English and maths skills, especially clients who are female and have high support needs, make less progress in addressing physical and mental health issues.**

- The ability to read is a prerequisite to developing IT skills. **Many people who are homeless lack basic IT skills; 39 per cent of St Mungo's Broadway clients are unable to complete a basic online form.** People who are homeless recognise that IT skills are increasingly required to participate in society. The Government's Digital Strategy recognises that 'digital services are becoming the default option for accessing public services, entertainment and each other.'⁹
- The majority of people who are homeless are likely to start to claim Universal Credit in the coming years. People who claim Universal Credit and lack English, maths and IT skills will be expected to develop them. However, **it is currently unclear how support will be provided in relation to Universal Credit to enable people to develop these skills.**

English and maths learning opportunities, which work for people who are homeless

- Building motivation is key to engaging people who are homeless in learning opportunities to improve their English and maths skills. **Professionals or peers can motivate people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills through demonstrating that learning opportunities are relevant to their everyday lives, effective and worthwhile.**
- **People who are homeless may become more motivated to take advantage of opportunities to improve their basic English and maths skills through participating in informal learning opportunities, which can be provided through Government's Community Learning funding.**

⁸ St Mungo's and Broadway merged in 2014 to form St Mungo's Broadway. References to St Mungo's in this report refer to publications or data that was gathered from St Mungo's before the two organisations merged

⁹ Cabinet Office (2014) Government Digital Inclusion Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy#benefits>

- **Effective learning can be delivered to people who are homeless through units rather than fixed length courses and through teaching at a variable pace tailored to individual participants.** Tutors should be familiar with working with adults who have multiple support needs, for class sizes to be small and for one to one tutoring to be available. **A Government funded pilot programme, STRIVE,¹⁰ is funding homelessness agencies to deliver this type of provision.** Learning clubs and embedded learning are also promising learning models.
- Jobcentre Plus can require people to attend skills training in order to receive benefits. **If people who are homeless are required to attend basic English or maths training that is unlikely to help them develop these skills then they may be put off learning in the future and will waste time that could be spent more productively.**
- People who are homeless who are referred to English or maths training make more progress in their broader recovery from homelessness. **St Mungo's Broadway clients with an English or maths need who were referred to training recorded improved outcomes around managing their tenancy, substance use, physical health and meaningful use of time compared to those with a need who were not referred to training.**
- Homelessness, unemployment and health problems are expensive for the taxpayer. Investing in effective basic English and maths skills learning opportunities can help people to overcome these problems, leading to future savings for public services.
- Interviewees told us that engaging in English and maths training boosts their confidence and stimulated their interest in further learning.

Benefits of engaging in English and maths learning opportunities for people who are homeless

- The St Mungo's Broadway Basic Skills Team worked with 211 people who are homeless or are at risk of homelessness in 2013/14. More than 80 per cent of clients who have below level 1 literacy or numeracy and work with the team on a regular basis improve these skills by at least one level.

¹⁰ See page 28 for more information on STRIVE

Summary of recommendations to Government

(See page 33 for report's recommendations in more detail)

a. Government should make a long term commitment to fund English and maths programmes, which are designed for people who are homeless.

St Mungo's Broadway calls on Government to commit to funding a long term solution to providing English and maths programmes for people who are homeless. Such a solution would accrue benefits to multiple Government departments, including the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health.

Possible funding models for English and maths programmes for people who are homeless include:

- A distinct long term national programme, outside of the Adult Skills Budget (ASB), which supports people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills, as well as to progress into other training or education and to become more employable.
- Adapting ASB funding to provide learning opportunities to people who are homeless that recognise ongoing progress in improving English and maths skills, rather than only recognising the completion of courses and qualifications. The adapted funding approach would offer higher payments in order to reflect the costs of delivering effective learning opportunities to people who are homeless.

b. Government should commit to working with homelessness agencies to expand the STRIVE pre employment support pilot.

St Mungo's Broadway applauds the Government for supporting the STRIVE pre employment skills pilot, which is delivered in partnership by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis. It is envisaged that STRIVE will support at least 100 people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills and improve their employability.¹¹

STRIVE should also be rolled out to areas outside of London with high concentrations of people who are homeless. Running STRIVE in a number of areas could allow for different approaches to long term funding to be piloted, in addition to the grant funded model used for the London pilot. Expanding STRIVE would also enable more people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills.

Ongoing evaluation of STRIVE will record how participants benefit and gather learning from the pilot. Government should also commit to extend the London STRIVE pilot for another year, in order to better enable learning from previous years to be put into practice.

c. Government should scope the size of need and potential demand for basic English and maths skills provision for people who are homeless across England.¹²

This report has given an indication of the scale of the English and maths skills needs among people who are homeless. However, measurement on a larger, national scale would facilitate calculating the resources and funding required to meet this need across the country and should be undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and/or the Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹¹ See page 28 for more information on STRIVE

¹² This recommendation builds on a recommendation made by Gray, R., published by NIACE (2013) Helpful approaches to the delivery of English and maths provision for unemployed adults <http://shop.niace.org.uk/english-maths-provision-unemployed-adults.html>

d. If people who are homeless are required to attend training in order to receive benefits, then Government must ensure that this training is compatible with their learning and wider support needs.

As shown in this report, there is currently insufficient effective English and maths training available for people who are homeless. It is essential that requirements are only placed on a person to engage in English and maths training when the provision that they are required to participate in is likely to be effective. Poor experiences of learning can put people off participating in learning and work in the future.

e. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should encourage local authorities to better coordinate Community Learning and supported accommodation services.

Community Learning funding supports informal learning activities, which can develop confidence and motivation needed to engage in English and maths learning opportunities.

Local authorities commission both Community Learning and supported accommodation services. Participating in Community Learning can help people achieve outcomes that local authorities may require supported accommodation providers to work towards, including participation in leisure and cultural learning, improving mental health and entering work or training. Joining up these services could help both types of service to better achieve their aims.

f. The Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English should explore effective models of learning and ways to motivate people who are homeless.

Many people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills due to a lack of sufficiently flexible learning opportunities. The Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English should build on the findings of this report, and learning from the STRIVE pilot, to further develop effective models of learning and ways to motivate people who are homeless.

Introduction

The three R's, reading, writing and arithmetic, have long been at the heart of our basic education. Whether to read about medication, find out which bus to catch or work out a weekly shopping budget, English and maths skills play a crucial role in our everyday lives. However, shockingly, many people who are homeless navigate life without them. We believe this holds many back in their recovery from homelessness.

Our previous research has highlighted some of the consequences of a widespread lack of English and maths skills among people who are homeless. The St Mungo's 2012 joint report with Crisis and Homeless Link, *'The Programme's Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme'*, found that a lack of English and maths skills often prevents people who are homeless from finding work. Broadway's *'Keeping work'* (2013) found that difficulties around budgeting and the benefits system could undermine the motivation of people who had experienced homelessness to remain in work.

Here, we aim to build on this research, and that of others,

to provide evidence about the causes and consequences of low English and maths skills among people who are homeless, and the extent of the need for training. As far as we are aware, the skills check assessment exercise carried out for this report is the largest survey of the English and maths skills of people who are homeless based on direct assessment ever carried out in the UK.

The Government has recognised the crucial role of English and maths in recovery from homelessness and has made promising commitments, including funding pilot services. However, we are lacking a long term solution.

By providing recommendations, both in terms of practice – drawing on our experience of supporting people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills – and in terms of policy – outlining possible solutions to the challenges posed by current funding systems and policies – we hope this report provides the foundations needed to ensure that people across the country who are homeless have access to English and maths support which is so crucial in recovery from homelessness.

Methodology

This report draws on a range of existing literature, as well as data gathered through primary research, including:

- Skills check assessments of the English and maths skills of 139 people who are homeless using the 'Skills for Life Smart Move Skills Check' tool. As far as we are aware this is the largest survey of the English and maths skills of people who are homeless based on direct assessment ever carried out in the UK.
- In depth semi structured interviews of 30 St Mungo's Broadway clients who have used St Mungo's Broadway's basic skills services. Interviews were undertaken in January and February 2014 by researchers from St Mungo's Broadway and the Work Foundation.
- Six semi structured interviews with professionals including St Mungo's Broadway basic skills tutors and managers, a hostel manager, two FE college principals and one senior FE college staff member.
- St Mungo's 2013 Client Needs Survey, which was undertaken by operational staff in February 2013. Data was collected on 1,595 residents of St Mungo's projects in England.
- 1,449 St Mungo's clients' individual records. Changes in Outcomes Star¹³ scores for these clients in their first year in our projects were analysed. This data was matched with Client Needs Survey data on English and maths needs and referral to skills providers.
- A focus group bringing together operational and policy experts in the field from St Mungo's Broadway, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and the Work Foundation.
- Discussion with Government officials from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Communities and Local Government.

¹³ The Outcomes Star is a tool that records people's progress in a number of areas of recovery such as physical health, mental wellbeing and managing a tenancy. Progress is recorded for each recovery area on a scale of 1-10 by key workers. For more information on the Outcomes Star see <http://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/an-example-st-mungos/>

Policy context

Government funding for adult English and maths training is provided through the wider Adult Skills Budget, which has been cut from £2.71 billion in 2012/13 to £2.26 billion for 2014/15, with further cuts planned. Despite these cuts, the Government has maintained entitlements for all adult learners to fully funded English and maths provision to support progression to GCSE grade C level.¹⁴

The Government is also rolling out a new model of Community Learning, Community Trust Pilots, with objectives to help people of different ages and backgrounds get a new skill, reconnect with learning, follow an interest, prepare to progress to formal courses and learn how to support their children better.¹⁵ The £210 million per year Community Learning budget has been protected from cuts to Government spending.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' 2010 skills strategy committed to prioritise public funding for the people who need the most help and have had the fewest opportunities.¹⁶ Government has also committed to 'prioritise access to further education and skills services for the most disadvantaged, including homeless people'.¹⁷

From June 2013 to March 2014, a programme of English and maths learning pilots for 'niche groups', including people who are homeless, was coordinated by NIACE with funding from BIS. Financial capability workshops and reading groups were delivered by a number of organisations including St Mungo's, Crisis and the Prince's Trust. The pilots demonstrated that voluntary and community sector organisations can deliver this type of learning, but that their capacity to do is limited by a lack of resources.

In early 2014, the Labour Party announced a policy to introduce a Basic Skills Test to assess all new claimants for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) within six weeks. Those who do not have the skills they need to work would have to take up training alongside their jobsearch or lose their benefits. This would build on measures introduced by the Government to allow Jobcentre Plus to require JSA claimants to attend skills training.

The Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into adult literacy and numeracy. The inquiry report will be published in early summer 2014. St Mungo's Broadway submitted both written and oral evidence to this inquiry.¹⁸

In April 2014, Skills and Enterprise Minister Matthew Hancock announced the creation of a new Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English. The centre will look at how best to motivate people to improve their English and maths and how to develop models of learning that have the flexibility to fit with people's lives.¹⁹

English, maths and homelessness

In 2012 St Mungo's, Crisis and Homeless Link published a report on the Work Programme, which raised concerns that people who were homeless were not engaging in English and maths learning and, as a result, were at a significant disadvantage when accessing the Work Programme. St Mungo's and other homelessness organisations used the report to make the case to Government to fund an English, maths, IT and employability skills programme for people who are homeless.

¹⁴ Department for Education, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/186830/13-960-rigour-and-responsiveness-in-skills-amended.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-learning-government-funding>

¹⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2010) Skills for Sustainable Growth <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/further-education-skills/docs/s/10-1274-skills-for-sustainable-growth-strategy.pdf>

¹⁷ HM Government (2011) Vision to end rough sleeping: No second night out nationwide https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62611/1939099.pdf

¹⁸ St Mungo's Broadway (2014) Response to Business, Innovation and Skills Committee Inquiry into Adult Literacy and Numeracy <http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/documents/4686/4686.pdf>, Business, Innovation and Skills Committee Oral evidence: Adult Literacy and Numeracy, HC 1073 Tuesday 18 March 2014, <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/business-innovation-and-skills-committee/adult-literacy-and-numeracy/oral/7851.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-up-world-leading-adult-literacy-and-numeracy-research-centre>

In response, in April 2014 the Government announced STRIVE, a pre-employment skills pilot for people who are homeless in London. STRIVE is funded by the Skills Funding Agency and the Department for Communities and Local Government with the cooperation of the DWP through Jobcentre Plus (see page 28 for more information). STRIVE will work with at least 100 people over two years.

Despite the above Government commitments and relevant policy developments, there is a lack of evidence about the extent of the need for basic English and maths training among people who are homeless. This report is intended to fill this gap. This report also aims to show how supporting people who are homeless to improve their English and maths could be prioritised within the skills system.

Who is this report concerned with?

'Homelessness' is a broad term that can apply to a number of different groups. Many official homelessness statistics refer to people who are 'accepted' as homeless by local authority housing services. To be accepted as homeless, a person has to be eligible for assistance,²⁰ be legally classed as homeless, be deemed not to have intentionally made themselves homeless and be found to meet 'priority need' criteria.²¹ Local authorities have a duty to secure accommodation for people who are accepted as homeless.

This report is concerned with people who are commonly referred to as 'single homeless people'. Single homeless people are generally understood to be those who do not meet the above priority need criteria, but may nevertheless have significant support needs. Single homeless people may live in supported accommodation, such as hostels and semi independent housing projects, or sleep rough. Single homelessness is a term which can also refer to some people who live in squats or sofa surf.²²

In 2014, Homeless Link estimated that there were 38,534 bed spaces in supported accommodation for people who are homeless.²³ The Department for Communities and Local Government publishes annual figures on rough sleeping in England. These snapshot figures are based on one off street counts or estimates from local authorities. The most recent figures suggest there were 2,414 people sleeping rough on any one night during the autumn of 2013. However many more people sleep rough over the course of a year. In total 6,437 people were counted sleeping rough in London alone in the year up April 2013.²⁴

Issues faced by single homeless people

Homelessness is rarely just a housing issue, other problems cause and are exacerbated by homelessness and many people who are homeless experience multiple and long term issues. The single homeless population has high levels of physical health, mental health and substance use needs. In 2013;

- 52 per cent of St Mungo's residents had drug or alcohol issues
- 45 per cent had a significant physical health condition
- 60 per cent had a mental health problem.

These personal problems are often sufficiently serious to act with other factors to cause a person to become homeless and to prevent them from escaping homelessness, but not sufficiently serious to meet thresholds for local authority residential care or 'in-patient services in the health system'.

²⁰ People who are subject to immigration control, with certain exceptions, and other defined groups of people from are not eligible for housing or homelessness assistance. See The Allocation of Housing and Homelessness (Eligibility) (England) Regulations 2006

²¹ Priority need criteria are intended to protect families with children, pregnant women, 16 and 17 year olds, care leavers, people who have been made homeless by a disaster and people who meet certain definitions of vulnerability. For more information see http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/help_from_the_council_when_homeless/priority_need

²² Sofa surfers are people who habitually stay with friends, family or acquaintances rather than in accommodation that they themselves own or rent

²³ Homeless Link (2014) Support for Single homeless people in England <http://homeless.org.uk/news/housing-shortage-making-it-harder-leave-homelessness-behind#.U2ftHXaKvhJE>

²⁴ Broadway (2013) CHAIN Annual Report: Street to Home http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/Reports/S2h2013/Street-to-home-report-2012_13.pdf

Findings

1. The extent to which people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills

Findings from the 139 skills check assessments carried out for this research suggest that:

- People who are homeless are considerably more likely than the general population to lack basic English skills; 51 per cent of people who are homeless lack the basic English skills needed for everyday life (i.e. equivalent to below Level 1 on the NQF, or GCSE grade D-G), compared to 15 per cent of the adult population of England.²⁵
- 55 per cent of those we assessed were found to lack basic maths skills. Due to a greater prevalence of poor maths skills in general population (49 per cent)²⁶ there is less of a gap between the maths skills of people who are homeless and the general population.

This new data supports existing research suggesting people who are homeless are more likely than the general population to lack basic English and maths skills. Previous research has found that people who are homeless are twice as likely as the general population to have no qualifications.²⁷ Our 2013 survey data suggests that at least a third of our clients cannot fill in a basic form without support. Thames Reach research published in 2010 found that 46 per cent of people living in its projects indicated they had general problems with writing and 38 per cent had trouble understanding written materials.²⁸

This widespread lack of basic English and maths skills suggests that the adult skills system is not working for people who are homeless, and that the Government must do more to 'prioritise access to further education and skills services for the most disadvantaged, including homeless people'.²⁹

People who are homeless are among the most excluded people in society. The next section of this report shows how lacking basic English and maths skills contributes to exclusion from work, housing, benefits and access to digital technology. The widespread lack of basic English and maths skills among people who are homeless has implications for many areas of Government policy.

2. The consequences for people who are homeless of lacking basic English and maths skills

The extent to which reading, writing and completing basic maths tasks are ingrained in everyday life for most people means it can be hard to imagine what life is like without these skills. Similarly, it can be hard to imagine the hardships associated with sleeping rough or not having a settled home. People who experience both of these disadvantages often find that lacking basic English and maths skills makes escaping and recovering from homelessness more difficult.

²⁵ Department of Business, Innovations and Skills (2011) Skills for life survey: a survey of literacy, numeracy and IT levels in England <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey>

²⁶ Department of Business, Innovations and Skills (2011) Skills for life survey: a survey of literacy, numeracy and IT levels in England <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2011-skills-for-life-survey>

²⁷ Crisis (2006) Homeless people and learning & skills participation, barriers and progression [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills\[1\].pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills[1].pdf)

²⁸ Thames Reach (2010) Turning the key <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/publications/research-reports/turning-the-key/>

²⁹ HM Government (2011) Vision to end rough sleeping: No second night out nationwide https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

2.1. Finding work

A recent Government paper states that “if people are not able to achieve basic levels of English or maths, then they will struggle to find work of any kind in today’s demanding labour market.”³⁰ Work Foundation research has found that the employment rate of the least skilled fell markedly in the economic downturn, and long term trends suggest that those lacking English and maths skills who do find work are at an increased risk of being trapped in poorly paid jobs.³¹ As the employment rate increases, people who are homeless risk being left behind if they are not supported to overcome the barriers they face to finding work.

The widespread lack of basic English and maths skills among people who are homeless helps to explain why so many are out of work. A survey of 1,595 St Mungo’s clients carried out in 2013 found that only six per cent of were in any form of paid work and that two thirds of our clients had either never worked or had not worked during the past five years. The survey found that clients who work generally have better English and maths skills than clients who do not work; 18 per cent of those in work were unable to fill in a form without assistance, compared to 34 per cent of those not in work.

Basic English skills, in particular, are not only required by an increasing proportion of employers, they also play an ever more vital role in preparing for and finding work. Developing a CV, applying for jobs and understanding correspondence from employers or JCP all require basic reading and writing skills.

The above activities are included in conditions attached to out of work benefits. A 2013 survey found that 31 per cent of homeless people on Job seeker’s Allowance have been sanctioned, i.e. had their benefits stopped for not

meeting these conditions, compared to just three per cent of typical claimants.³² This may be partly explained by the fact that many people who are homeless cannot read well enough to understand what they are required to do by JCP, especially as this is often communicated through a letter. They may also be unable to complete required tasks, such as applying for a job.

“Benefit letters, prime example [of problems related to poor English for people who are homeless], what the hell does this mean? What do they want me to do or what are they doing to me now? A keyworker will sit down and say this means this or that means that or you’ve got to ring this person.”

Former St Mungo’s Broadway client

2.2. Recovery from homelessness

Homelessness is rarely simply a housing issue; mental and physical health issues, substance use and offending are far more prevalent among people who are homeless than the general population

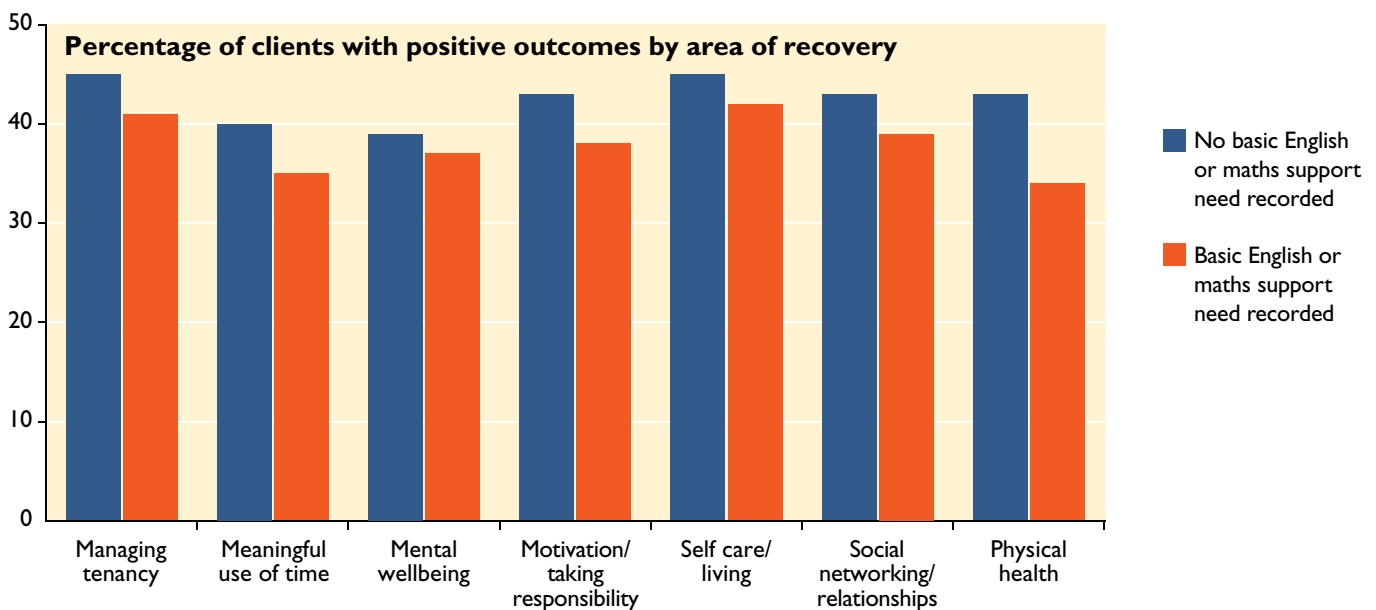
Analysis of 1,449 clients who stayed in St Mungo’s projects during the period between 2009 and 2014 found that those with low basic skills made less progress in many areas of recovery in their first year of engaging with St Mungo’s services, as demonstrated by the graph overleaf.

The biggest difference can be seen in physical health, where 43 per cent of clients with no recorded English and maths support need made a positive improvement, compared with only 35 per cent of those with a basic skills need. Clients without an English and maths support need are also more likely to use their time meaningfully, with 40 per cent experiencing positive change in this area, compared with 35 per cent of those lacking basic skills.

³⁰ Department for Education, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2013) Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/186830/13-960-rigour-and-responsiveness-in-skills-amended.pdf

³¹ Sissons, P., published by the Work Foundation (2011) The Hourglass and the Escalator: Labour market change and mobility [http://www.theworkfoundation.com/DownloadPublication/Report/292_hourglass_escalator120711%20\(2\)%20\(3\).pdf](http://www.theworkfoundation.com/DownloadPublication/Report/292_hourglass_escalator120711%20(2)%20(3).pdf)

³² Homeless Link (2013) A high cost to pay: The impact of benefit sanctions on homeless people http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-downloads/A%20High%20Cost%20to%20Pay%20Sept13_0.pdf



The causal link between basic English and maths skills and support needs is complex. It is likely that lacking basic maths and English skills makes it more difficult to recover from homelessness, and that being trapped in homelessness makes it harder to develop these skills.

“My focus is not on shall I take drugs or shall I not take drugs. My focus is on I want to stay on the course and I want to move forward....and this is being compromised by my drug addiction.”
St Mungo’s Broadway client

Section five of this report describes how addressing English and maths issues can help people break out of this vicious circle and make more progress in their recovery from homelessness.

2.3. Resettlement into independent accommodation

Poor English skills can affect the ability of people who are homeless to move out of supported accommodation

and into independent housing. St Mungo’s Broadway staff report that they regularly have to help clients to understand adverts for accommodation and tenancy agreements, as well as how to budget for housing and other essential costs.

Maths skills are required to budget effectively and so are especially important for people who have experienced homelessness and are moving into or living in independent accommodation. The FORHOME study recorded the experiences of 400 people who had been homeless as they moved from supported accommodation into independent housing. The report found that *‘the levels of preparedness and knowledge about bills and finances were low. Less than one half had received advice or training in managing money at their previous hostel or supported housing. Although at the time many believed that they did not need such help, they subsequently experienced problems.’*³³

³³ Crane, M., Warnes, T., and Coward, S. (2011) Moves to Independent Living: Single Homeless People’s Experiences and Outcomes of Resettlement http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/media/57906/for-home_final_report.pdf

2.4. Impact on women

Women in homelessness services tend to have more complicated problems than men, and tend to enter homelessness services at a later stage when their problems have escalated. In addition, most people who use homelessness services are male, which often results in services being more focused on and responsive to the needs of men than women.³⁴

For the purposes of this research the progress of male and female St Mungo's Broadway clients with high support needs were compared. Analysis of 1,449 St Mungo's clients' recovery from homelessness found that clients who lack basic English and maths skills, especially clients who are female and have high support needs, make less progress in addressing physical and mental health issues. Of those clients who lack basic English and maths skills and have high support needs, 61 per cent of women recorded positive outcomes compared to 78 per cent of men.

2.5. Universal Credit

In the future, it is likely that the vast majority of people who are homeless will claim Universal Credit. Universal Credit is replacing six benefits, including Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment Support Allowance and Housing Benefit. Universal Credit is currently being rolled out in selected areas of the country, it is envisaged that most existing benefit claimants will be moved over to Universal Credit during 2016 and 2017.

Most people who receive Universal Credit will claim it online and have the benefit paid directly into their bank account once a month. This differs from existing arrangements in which benefits are paid either weekly or fortnightly, with housing benefit often being paid directly to the landlord.

The Government has recognised that many people will initially lack the skills necessary to claim the benefit online and to budget for a monthly payment. There are alternative arrangements to online claims and monthly direct payments, however it is envisaged that in most cases these alternative payment arrangements will be open to claimants only for a limited amount of time, and that they will eventually be required to claim online. People who lack the English and maths skills needed to claim the benefit will therefore generally be expected to develop these skills.³⁵

Our skills check assessments suggest that 55 per cent of people who are homeless lack basic maths skills and 51 per cent lack basic English skills. These people will generally need to develop these skills in order to claim Universal Credit. It is therefore vital that support is available for people to do so. However, it is currently unclear how support will be provided around Universal Credit to enable such development.³⁶

2.6. IT Skills

The St Mungo's 2013 client needs survey shows that 39 per cent of St Mungo's clients were unable to fill in a simple online form. This not only affects their ability to find work, 'digital English' skills have become increasingly important for communication and accessing services and support.

³⁴ St Mungo's (2014) Rebuilding Shattered Lives: The final report

<http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives-Final-Report.pdf>

³⁵ Universal Credit claimants living in supported accommodation that falls within the Government's new definition of 'Specified Accommodation' will have their housing costs met by housing benefit in much the same way as it is now. However, when they move out of supported accommodation and into independent living, support for housing costs will be paid through Universal Credit

³⁶ The general approach to supporting people to claim Universal Credit is set out in Department for Work and Pensions (2013) Universal Credit Local Support Services – update and trialling plan <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-local-support-services-update-and-trialling-plan>

“They [The Work Programme provider] had various programmes there to help people learn IT skills, but a lot of those who might have enrolled found it way above them because they may not have been literate to start with. They could have done with lower level English teaching, which I’m sure a lot of them were too embarrassed to admit.”

Former St Mungo’s Broadway client

Most of the interviewees said they were currently developing or would like to develop IT skills. The primary motivations for wanting to develop IT skills were around finding work. The Government’s digital inclusion strategy recognises that a lack of literacy skills may prevent people from developing IT skills.³⁷

Whereas in the past, some had been able to work without possessing any IT skills, for example as casual labourers, interviewees felt that IT skills were now increasingly required by employers and were also vital in finding and applying for employment. Several of the interviewees had passed or were working towards passing the computer based Construction Skills Certificate Scheme test. Passing this test entitles people to a card needed to work on construction sites.

“I remember walking into places, saying have you got a job and handing over my CV, then getting a phone call half an hour later. I became unemployed two or three years ago and now it’s ‘look online, look online.’”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

The Government’s Digital Strategy recognises that reducing digital exclusion can help address many wider equality, social, health and wellbeing issues such as isolation.³⁸ Basic IT skills can be considered alongside English and maths skills as a vital tool to enable people who are homeless to make progress in key areas of their lives, including health, work, and housing.

3. Why people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills

In order to understand the challenges around supporting people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills, it is helpful to understand why many people who are homeless lack these skills. This section is informed by interviews with people who are homeless, and draws on their powerful testimonies to outline common factors that explain a widespread lack of basic English and maths skills.

3.1. Traumatic childhoods

High proportions of people who have experienced homelessness alongside other types of social exclusion, report having run away from home as a child (34 per cent), observed violence between parents or carers (27 per cent), been sexually abused (23 per cent) or physically abused at home (22 per cent).³⁹ Homeless women are more likely to have experienced childhood abuse than homeless men,⁴⁰ so may be more likely to be affected by barriers to learning associated with early abuse.

The United States Government has listed research that consistently finds child abuse and neglect increases the risk of lower academic achievement and problematic school performance.⁴¹

“I didn’t get any O Levels, but it wasn’t because I didn’t have the intelligence to do so, it was just my home life was so disruptive that I basically dropped out of school.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

³⁷ Cabinet Office (2014) Government Digital Inclusion Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy#benefits>

³⁸ Cabinet Office (2014) Government Digital Inclusion Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-digital-inclusion-strategy/government-digital-inclusion-strategy#benefits>

³⁹ Crane, M., Warnes, T., and Coward, S. (2011) Moves to Independent Living: Single Homeless People’s Experiences and Outcomes of Resettlement http://www.centrepoint.org.uk/media/57906/for-home_final_report.pdf

⁴⁰ St Mungo’s (2014) Rebuilding Shattered Lives: The final report <http://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives-Final-Report.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.childwelfare.gov/can/impact/development/academic.cfm>

Nine per cent of St Mungo's Broadway clients report having spent time in local authority care.⁴² Research has shown that care leavers experience significantly worse educational outcomes than their peers.⁴³ This is likely to be due in part to frequent school moves arising from moves in and out of care or between care placements.⁴⁴

3.2. Poor experiences of school

Previous research has found that many homeless adults report having difficulties at school.⁴⁵ In a 2013 survey of 1,595 St Mungo's clients, 28 per cent reported having left school with no qualifications at all and only 18 per cent reported having qualifications above GCSE level. Several interviewees said that they felt they had not been well taught at school, they suggested that teachers did not care about them and that classes were too large. Homeless people can be reluctant to try again following previous negative experiences with the education system.⁴⁶

“When I was in secondary school ... they didn't care... all they wanted to do was get their wages at the end of the week.”
St Mungo's Broadway client

“He wasn't a good teacher and he was one of them that picked out a handful of kids and teached them and the rest can [interviewee gestured leaving the room]...”
St Mungo's Broadway client

3.3. Dyslexia

Practitioners we interviewed said that they suspected many of the homeless people they work with are dyslexic. A 2008 UK study found that 'homeless people are significantly more likely to have an intellectual disability than the general population'.⁴⁷ A 2012 Canadian study found that 'childhood learning problems are overrepresented among homeless adults with complex co morbidities and long histories of homelessness'.⁴⁸

Several interviewees said that they were dyslexic and that their specialist learning needs had not been addressed at school. One interviewee explained that they were “branded as really stupid” because their dyslexia was not identified by their teachers. This childhood experience made them unwilling to engage in opportunities to learn as an adult, as they associated engaging in learning with their self esteem being undermined.

“I needed to address my demons, and accept that I am dyslexic and sort out my spelling. So I came to St Mungo's and they've been helping me with my literacy and my IT skills.”
St Mungo's Broadway client

⁴² St Mungo's (2013) Client Needs Survey

⁴³ HM Government (2013) Care Leavers Strategy <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/care-leaver-strategy>

⁴⁴ Thames Reach (2010) Turning the key <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/publications/research-reports/turning-the-key/>

⁴⁵ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills\[1\].pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills[1].pdf)

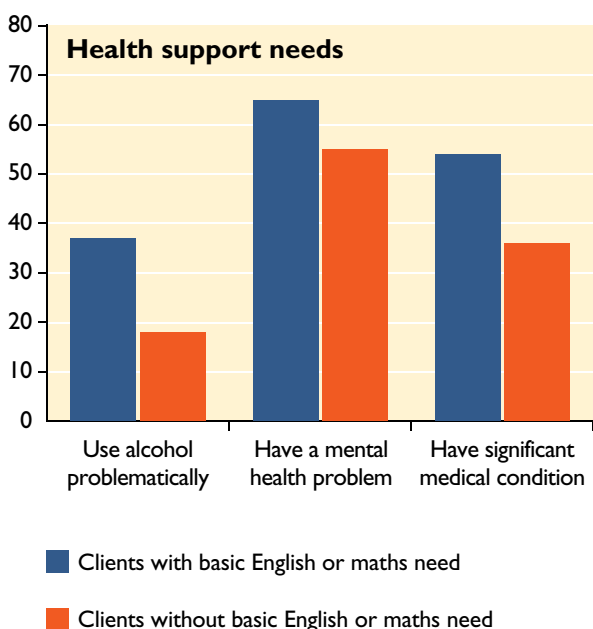
⁴⁶ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills\[1\].pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills[1].pdf)

⁴⁷ Oakes, PM., Davies, RC. (2008) Intellectual disability in homeless adults: a prevalence study, *Journal of Intellectual Disability* 12(4):325-34

⁴⁸ Patterson, M., Moniruzzaman, A., Frankish, C. and Somers, J., (2012) Missed opportunities: childhood learning disabilities as early indicators of risk among homeless adults with mental illness in Vancouver, British Columbia <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/2/6/e001586.full?rss=1>

3.4. Health conditions

As indicated in the graph below, St Mungo's Broadway clients with poor basic English and maths skills are more likely to have physical health, mental health and alcohol use problems than those without basic skills needs.

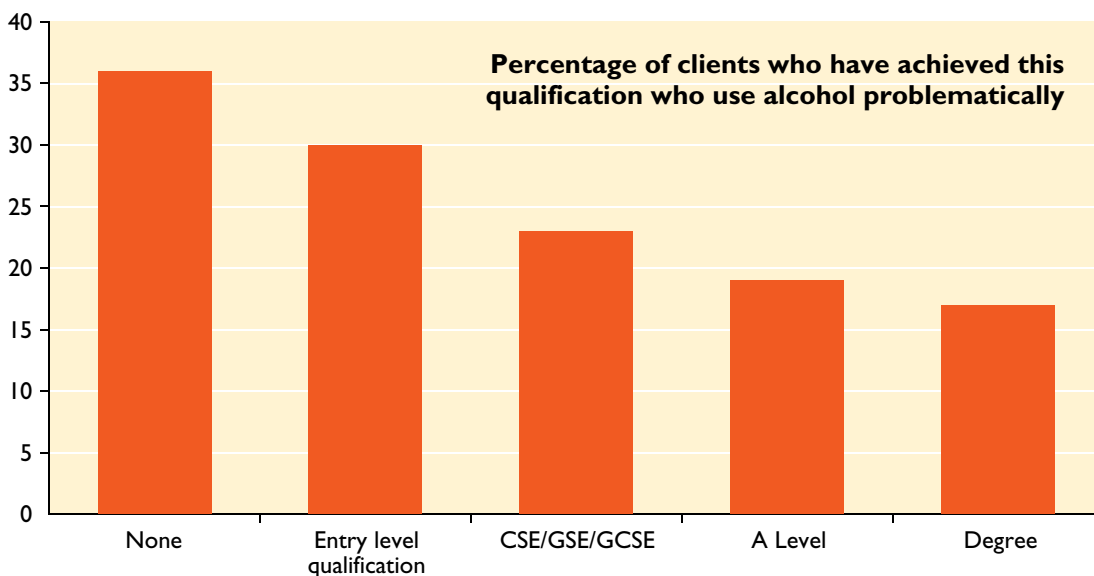


These problems have direct physical effects on concentration and cognition, making it harder to improve English and maths skills. Luby and Welch suggest that “learners with substance misuse and mental health needs in particular can find it difficult to concentrate for long periods or keep to a very regular learning regime”.⁴⁹ Health issues can also make it difficult to regularly attend courses and complete assignments on time, which makes completing mainstream further education courses difficult.

The wider literature emphasises the link between health and basic skills. Health problems make it harder to learn and low skills also contribute to poor health. A 2012 report by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills found that a “lack of adult numeracy skills were associated with deteriorating self-rated health for men and women”.⁵⁰ An OECD report found “considerable international evidence that education is strongly linked to health and to determinants of health such as health behaviours, risky contexts and preventative service use. Moreover, we find that a substantial element of this effect is causal”.⁵¹

Alcohol Concern has noted the strong relationship between school performance and alcohol, finding that the relationship works both ways, with poor school performance and exclusion encouraging drinking, and drinking causing exclusions and truancy.⁵² The graph opposite shows that the higher the level of qualification achieved, the less likely St Mungo's clients were to use alcohol problematically; 36 per cent of clients with no qualifications use alcohol problematically, decreasing to 17 per cent among clients with a degree.

⁴⁹ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills\[1\].pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills[1].pdf)
⁵⁰ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2012) The Contribution of Basic Skills to Health Related Outcomes During Adulthood: Evidence from the BCS70 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/34667/12-1239-contribution-basic-skills-to-health-outcomes.pdf
⁵¹ OECD (2013) Measuring The Effects Of Education On Health And Civic Engagement: Proceedings Of The Copenhagen Symposium <http://www1.oecd.org/edu/innovation-education/37425753.pdf>
⁵² Alcohol Concern (2013) Demon Drink? A study of alcohol and youth offending in London http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/assets/files/Publications/2013/Demon%20Drink_web%20version.pdf



3.5. Lack of settled accommodation

The inherent instability of homelessness can also be a barrier to enrolling and remaining on English and maths courses. The extreme hardship and precariousness of living on the streets can make engaging in any activity difficult.

“When you’re homeless you’re in trouble, you can’t think properly. You’re on the street cold, it’s difficult. When you’re homeless you’re thinking that you need somewhere to live, you’re not thinking about reading and writing.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Interviewees also suggested that frequent moves and uncertainty associated with living in supported accommodation could disrupt learning.

3.6. Skills atrophy

When skills are not used they can deteriorate.⁵³ Several interviewees explained that their skills had weakened over time as they had not had the opportunity to use them.

“I would like to improve my writing... Because after school I’ve never had to do much writing and the writing I had to do was repetitive... I was always good at maths but then again... [I’m] out of practice. Perhaps again you could do the basics... I would like to do something like that because I quite enjoyed maths.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

The longer that someone is homeless, the less likely they are to take action to prevent their skills from atrophying. Previous research has found that people who have been homeless for longer find it more difficult to fit into mainstream activities, and that the longer someone has been homeless, the less likely they are to want to engage in learning.⁵⁴

This section has shown that homelessness and a lack of basic English and maths skills can often be explained by the same factors, which in many cases go back to people’s childhood. Homelessness and a lack of English and maths skills can reinforce each other, forming a vicious circle that traps people in lives characterised by exclusion and disadvantage.

⁵³ Bynner, J. and Parsons, S., published by Basic Skills Agency (1998) Use it or lose it: the impact of time out of work on English and maths skills

⁵⁴ Crisis (2006) Homeless people and learning & skills participation, barriers and progression [http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills\[1\].pdf](http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homeless%20people%20and%20learning%20and%20skills[1].pdf)

4. Why mainstream English and maths provision does not work for people who are homeless

Housing, health and employment support services can find it difficult to provide effective services to people who are homeless due to their high, and often multiple, support needs.⁵⁵ As shown below, adult skills services can also find it difficult to work effectively with people who are homeless. It is especially noteworthy that FE college principals suggested that the emphasis with Adult Skills Budget funding on completing courses and qualifications, makes it difficult for FE colleges to work with people who are homeless.

4.1. Limited identification and assessment of English and maths needs

Jobcentre Plus, Work Programme providers and the Prison Service are all frequently in contact with people who are homeless or who become homeless. These services are expected to identify basic English and maths needs. Several interviewees told us that they had experience of these services, but that their English and maths problems had not been identified until they arrived at St Mungo's Broadway's services.

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice has expressed concern 'about the number of prisoners who have poor literacy and numeracy', and the Government has committed to introducing mandatory assessment of learning needs for all prisoners on reception from August 2014.⁵⁶

Jobcentre Plus skills assessments have been found to be inconsistent and to rarely make use of screening tools.⁵⁷ People who are homeless report that Work Programme providers often do not ask them about their barriers to employment, let alone support them to overcome these barriers.⁵⁸

Even if steps are taken to identify skills needs, people who are homeless often attempt to conceal poor skills, especially poor English skills. Interviewees suggested that this is often due to feelings of embarrassment or shame. Health services studies in the US have consistently found that feelings of shame prevent people from disclosing literacy issues.⁵⁹ Professionals interviewed for this research suggested that people who have experienced homelessness may be especially likely to conceal basic skills needs due to a mistrust of services and a lack of motivation to engage in learning.

"I think people who have been homeless for a long period of time, it takes them a long time to get their self-confidence back together. They feel like they're a different class of community, they don't fit in.... Sometimes it's pride [that prevents a person] to go and ask for help. You've got your pride and you've got... embarrassment ... fear of messing up and what are people going to think..."

St Mungo's Broadway client

⁵⁵ See St Mungo's (2013) No More: Homelessness through the eyes of recent rough sleepers <http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/documents/4084/4084.pdf>; Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's (2012) The Programme's Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1480_the-programme-s-not-working-experiences-of-homeless-people-on-the-work-programme; St Mungo's, Homeless Link (2012) Improving hospital admission and discharge for people who are homeless http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1287_improving-hospital-admission-and-discharge-for-people-who-are-homeless

⁵⁶ Hansard, House of Commons Debates 30 April 2014 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140430/halltext/140430h0002.htm#140430420000030>

⁵⁷ Bells, A., Oakley, J., Sigala, M. and Dewson, S. published by Department for Work and Pensions (2011) Identifying claimants' needs: Research into the Capability of Jobcentre Plus advisers https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214522/rrep748.pdf

⁵⁸ Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's (2012) The Programme's Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1480_the-programme-s-not-working-experiences-of-homeless-people-on-the-work-programme

⁵⁹ Committee on Health Literacy, Board on Neuroscience and Behavioral Health, Institute of Medicine (2004) Health Literacy: A Prescription to End Confusion

4.2. Lack of appropriate English and maths learning opportunities

The Government fully funds English and maths learning up to the level of GCSE grade C for those with an identified English and maths need. However, the high proportion of people who are homeless who have basic skill needs suggests that many are not benefitting from this funded provision.

“If you’re involved in Job Centre Plus, you are mandated to go on programmes that might not suit people who are homeless.”

FE College principal

Professionals who work with people who are homeless suggest that there are often few suitable basic skills training services to which to refer their clients to. A survey of all of St Mungo’s residential project based key workers in 2013 found they were able to refer 27 per cent of clients with an identified English skills need to English training, and 33 per cent of clients who have had an identified maths need to maths training.

Several interviewees reported that they had not benefitted as much as they had hoped from starting college courses. They felt that tutors were distant and unresponsive to their individual learning needs and courses often progressed at too quick a pace. Many clients expressed anxiety and a lack of confidence about participating in large groups.

“I went to colleges [and] it’s not the same relationship - there is a big distance between you and the teacher. All they do is give you something and [you have to] use your own brain, if you get it then you get it and if you don’t then you don’t. In Mungo’s, it’s different.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

“The Jobcentre sent me to [an adult education college] but I didn’t want to go – there were no bad and no good things – I just went there and sat my hours – but I wasn’t really interested in what was happening.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Many people who are homeless struggle to attend courses regularly due to other needs and commitments.⁶⁰ Homeless people are often receiving support for a range of issues and from multiple sources. Appointments with other agencies, for example the JCP or counselling services, can clash with structured or time limited courses.⁶¹

Some interviewees expressed concerns over their capacity to complete and pass fixed length courses which required regular attendance. One suggested that the fear of (another) failure meant that he was unwilling to enrol on this type of course. Concerns about likely success rates were raised by FE college heads as a key reason why they did not provide English and maths courses targeted at people who are homeless (see section four of this report).

“If I do miss dates we can go back over it [on a St Mungo’s Broadway course]. But if I’m on a 12 week course somewhere else and miss units and fall behind then I’m in trouble. And it would have been another failed attempt.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

“What we get is people coming on courses and then they can’t finish them, because their housing situation changes.”

FE College principal

More detail on what types of learning opportunity do and do not work for people who are homeless can be found in section five of this report.

⁶⁰ Thames Reach (2010) Turning the key <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/publications/research-reports/turning-the-key/>

⁶¹ Barton, D., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., Tusting, K. and Ivanic, R., published by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2006) Relating adults’ lives and learning: participation and engagement in different settings http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=48

4.3. Why are there are so few publicly funded English and maths opportunities that are appropriate for people who are homeless?

The vast majority of English and maths courses in England are funded from the ASB and delivered by FE colleges. FE college principles interviewed for this report suggested that the ASB funding system makes it difficult for them to provide courses, which are targeted at people who are homeless. They suggested that this is because people who are homeless are less likely to succeed on courses and gain qualifications, which can jeopardise colleges' funding.

According to the principal of a large FE college *“the college is funded to deliver education and training qualifications. What we are judged on is what our success rate is, that’s based on retention and achievement...You multiply your... achievement by your retention and you get what is called your success rate. That is what is monitored by funding bodies, Government, that’s what’s published. So if people don’t stay on your courses, your retention rate goes down and the success rate for those courses goes down. That means Government funded institutions are very wary of having those low success rates on their books unless it’s agreed.”*

The principal of another large FE college stated that *“we are measured on achievement on particular courses. For people who have more fragmented lives, who can’t necessarily commit, I think for us to be able to do shorter interventions that are maybe not measured as pass or fail, would be more helpful to us.”*

A recent Government vocational learning plan states that the current qualification led system has led to perverse incentives which can *“lead providers not to enrol or retain a learner who has a lower chance of completing a course of study and/or achieving a qualification”*. The plan also states that any solution to this will *“keep in view the need to ensure equal access for disadvantaged learners” with reference to people who are homeless.”*⁶²

4.4. English and maths training delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations

St Mungo's Broadway and other homelessness organisations have long recognised that many of the people with whom we work need to improve their English and maths. As little public funding is available to deliver learning opportunities that can meet this need, homelessness organisations are often left with no option other than to deliver learning using charitable income. However, homelessness agencies' charitable income is insufficient to meet the high level of English and maths support need among people who are homeless.

Charities and their donors may also object to their charitable income being relied upon to meet Government priorities. Alongside Crisis and Homeless Link, we have highlighted how charities should not be forced to provide employment support for their clients who are let down by the Work Programme.⁶³ Nevertheless, as shown in the next section, charities will do what they can to ensure the people with whom they work have access to the services that they need.

⁶² Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) Getting the job done: the Government's reform plan for vocational qualifications https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/286749/bis-14-577-vocational-qualification-reform-plan.pdf

⁶³ Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo's (2012) The Programme's Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1480_the-programme-s-not-working-experiences-of-homeless-people-on-the-work-programme

5. Providing English and maths learning opportunities which work for people who are homeless

As outlined previously, our clients' experiences show that English and maths courses delivered by mainstream learning providers do not work for many people who are homeless. However, it is possible to deliver English and maths skills services, which do work for people who are homeless. This section sets out key features of these services.

5.1. Building confidence and motivation to engage with learning

"[In prison it was] just a way to spend time some way, they pay you a little bit of money....[but I was] not that motivated to follow the course."

St Mungo's Broadway client

Many of the interviewees had negative experiences of learning at school reinforced through training that they had participated in while in prison or courses that they had to be referred to by Jobcentre Plus. St Mungo's Broadway's basic skills services worked with 211 clients in 2013/14. Thirty of these clients were interviewed for this report and asked about their motivations for engaging with these services. St Mungo's Broadway key workers and peers were found to play an important role in convincing clients that learning opportunities offered by the organisation would differ from these prior experiences.

"My keyworker was the one that actually got me up and I was kind of going into a bit of a... just sleeping every day and not doing nothing. He brought me here and, as I say, there's a lot of help available... people really work with you. I needed that."

St Mungo's Broadway client

Several interviewees explained how they had been encouraged to engage in St Mungo's Broadway's provision because they had been convinced that it would give them the opportunity to work towards their own individual goals. They contrasted this to experiences of following set courses which they felt did not match their own aims. Previous research has highlighted the importance of understanding individual motivations for learning and linking opportunities to learn and develop skills to individual interests and goals.⁶⁴

"I was 32, and I felt like I write like a 6 year old. I wasn't happy with my handwriting and I wanted to improve."

St Mungo's Broadway client

People who are homeless are also often affected by shame, poor self esteem and mental and physical health issues, which can all lead to a lack of confidence. Skills providers report that a lack of confidence helps explain why people are not motivated to improve their English and maths.⁶⁵

5.1.1. Informal learning and motivation: St Mungo's Broadway Recovery Colleges

St Mungo's Broadway Recovery Colleges deliver informal learning opportunities to clients, staff and members of the general public. The Recovery Colleges provide informal opportunities for clients to learn new skills and engage in positive social activity. They are designed to support clients to build motivation, self esteem and confidence.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Barton, D., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., Tusting, K. and Ivanic, R., published by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2006) Relating adults' lives and learning: participation and engagement in different settings http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=48

⁶⁵ Gray, R., published by NIACE (2013) Helpful approaches to the delivery of English and maths provision for unemployed adults <http://shop.niace.org.uk/english-maths-provision-unemployed-adults.html>

⁶⁶ St Mungo's Broadway (2014) Recovery Results Recovery College Briefing http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1896_recovery-results-briefing-recovery-college

“Without the Recovery College, I would not be where I am today. Last April, employment was the last thing on my mind. But I’ve gained strength, and it’s helped me to do stuff I never thought I’d do, and given me a sense of achievement, and fulfilment. It’s been a godsend, and gave me something to fill the void, benefitting me immensely.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

A forthcoming evaluation of the St Mungo’s Broadway London Recovery College suggests that attending the college leads clients to feel less nervous about learning or studying, feel more confident trying new things and feel more comfortable in a classroom setting. Participating in Recovery Colleges or similar informal learning opportunities may therefore make it more likely that people take advantage of opportunities to address basic English and maths needs.

The Government funds informal learning through a £210 million Community Learning funding programme. However, in St Mungo’s Broadway’s experience the way in which this funding is allocated makes it hard to access in many of the areas in which we work.

5.1.2. Limited motivation to improve maths skills

It is interesting to note that, despite several self reports of weak maths there was limited desire among our interviewees to develop their maths skills. Weak maths skills were not perceived to be problematic in their everyday lives, particularly when compared to weak English skills.

This mirrors the relative lack of value placed on maths among the general population,⁶⁷ despite evidence that people with poor maths skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than those with good maths skills.⁶⁸

“A lot of people can get by without any fancy maths, but they can’t get by without being able to read and write English.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Case study – Tracy’s story

Tracy has experienced homelessness on and off for 13 years. She was fostered as a child and always felt like she was falling behind in school. *“I was told I was stupid and chaotic which I then believed. I didn’t spend much time in school so didn’t improve my literacy. I had no self esteem or confidence and am only starting to build on this now.”*

Poor literacy led to Tracy losing her home in the 1990s because she failed to fill in her housing benefit form. *“I didn’t know what it was so I put it in a drawer. I didn’t know whether there was support or where to find support to help me.”*

Tracy slept on trains for a couple of nights with her young child and her dog. She was also six months pregnant. After that they managed to stay with friends, but then Tracy and her partner fell out. *“I had to leave. He kept my daughter and I had to live on the street.”*

Things started to improve for Tracy when she moved into a St Mungo’s Broadway project and decided to volunteer with ‘Outside In’, a group set up to harness the voice, skills, talents and strengths of the people living in St Mungo’s Broadway hostels to help improve service delivery. Tracy also attended the London Recovery College where she has completed courses including self esteem, IT and assertiveness. She has also facilitated a knitting class.

“This has improved my confidence and self esteem and I am now improving my literacy. I can now complete forms and my hope for the future is to help people in the care sector.”

⁶⁷ <http://www.nationalmaths.org.uk/what-the-research-says/index.html>

⁶⁸ National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy (2009) Adult numeracy: A review of research http://nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=170#

“If someone short changes me in a shop I can tell how much they’ve given me.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

St Mungo’s Broadway is currently exploring how the National Numeracy Challenge⁶⁹ could motivate our clients, and staff, to improve their maths skills.

5.2. Teaching and class size

As detailed above, it is common for people who are homeless to have had poor experiences of school and adult education. It is also common for people who are homeless to feel that they have been let down by those in positions of authority.⁷⁰ These experiences can lead to a reluctance to engage with learning services due to fears of being let down again.⁷¹

In this context, tutors often have to overcome distrust in order to motivate people who are homeless to engage in English and maths learning. People who are homeless and professionals who work with people who are homeless suggest that trust can be built through being supportive and patient when other issues, such as alcohol use or mental health problems, affect a person’s ability to learn. Professionals suggested that dealing with these issues can be challenging for tutors who are not experienced in working with adults who have complex needs.

“They might have been in a hostel all of the night and not got any sleep, because of all of the chaos that’s going on. They could be dealing with lack of sleep, they could have been drinking all night, or they could be coming down. A lot of the clients are bringing along baggage, and a lot of it is heavy duty baggage. And you’ve got to take that into account if you’re trying to teach them something.”

St Mungo’s Broadway Basic Skills Tutor

“What you need is a service where you can feel a little bit of trust, a little bit of rapport, where you can get back that self esteem and that caring. When you get that caring back that’s where you can start that rebuilding.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

“I’ve been getting a lot of support and I feel comfortable here [St Mungo’s Broadway]. That’s the main thing, with the trust.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Trust and motivation are also built by tutors who are able to spend time with individual learners and deliver learning opportunities that learners feel are relevant to their lives, for example teaching reading through studying tenancy agreements, or teaching maths through calculating a weekly budget. Delivering this type of support is facilitated by small class sizes and one to one teaching. Small class sizes and one to one teaching may also be less intimidating for people who have had poor experiences at school.

“At [mainstream adult education college] there were around 20 students in a class with one teacher, whereas at St Mungo’s classes/groups tended to be smaller and there were two teachers...Small class sizes meant that the pace of the learning was much better as it could be tailored to each person.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Learning opportunities offered by St Mungo’s Broadway include one to one assistance, self directed learning (with support), group learning and learning clubs. We also embed English and maths learning in vocational training and through taking advantage of informal ‘teachable moments’ that arise in support work.

⁶⁹ <http://www.nationalnumeracy.org.uk/national-numeracy-challenge/index.html%20?>

⁷⁰ Crisis, Homeless Link and St Mungo’s (2012) The Programme’s Not Working: Experiences of homeless people on the Work Programme http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/homelessness/publications/latest_publications_and_research/1480_the-programme-s-not-working-experiences-of-homeless-people-on-the-work-programme

⁷¹ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

Learning Clubs

Learning Clubs are self organised learning groups, which encourage learners to teach and learn from each other.⁷² St Mungo's Broadway believes that they are a promising model for engaging with high need groups who are underrepresented in adult reading, writing and maths education.

St Mungo's Broadway recently delivered a Learning Club in south London as one of the 'niche groups' pilots coordinated by NIACE and funded by BIS. In total, 90 per cent of participants surveyed said they felt more confident about moving into other learning opportunities after participating in the pilot.

7.3. Pace and flexibility

As outlined on page 23, adults with chaotic lives and/or multiple and complex needs, can find it extremely challenging to regularly attend structured courses. People who are homeless interviewed for this report valued the opportunity to develop their skills at their own pace and participate in learning opportunities which are flexible enough to fit other support needs and commitments. Flexibility is required both to fit around clients' other appointments and to accommodate fluctuations in mood and motivation.⁷³

"I don't want to take too much on – I still go to groups at rehab [so it's a] good thing that I can just drop in."

St Mungo's Broadway client

"[I'm] Up and down – it all depends on how my mood is, how I'm feeling, what sort of news I'm getting – bad news, good news...with reading and writing. If I'm getting stressed then I can't concentrate."

St Mungo's Broadway client

STRIVE – STRIVE is an English, maths, IT and employability skills pilot project for people who are homeless. It became operational in April 2014.

- The pilot supports homeless benefit claimants to develop the English, maths, IT and soft skills necessary to get the most from mainstream skills training and employment support services. Employer led workshops, taster days and volunteering sessions help participants to become more familiar with workplace environments and build softer skills through direct interaction with employers at an early stage of their journey to work.
- Participants are helped to access services to address other support needs which are a barrier to work/or training (such as mental health or substance misuse issues).
- The pilot delivers learning opportunities tailored to the needs of homeless individual participants in a flexible and accessible format by tutors who are experienced at working with this client group.
- STRIVE will work with at least 51 people in north London each year. It started to operate in April 2014 and is envisaged to run for two years.
- The pilot is likely to cost about £300,000 to deliver; it is being funded by DCLG and BIS. These departments will also fund an extensive evaluation of STRIVE.
- The pilot is designed to be both scalable and replicable to other disadvantaged groups.

"If you go on a mainstream course, and you go on a binge and you miss a week or two, then you'll be behind on the course. But if you come here [it's] 'we can kind of work with you, we can accommodate you.'"

St Mungo's Broadway client

⁷² For more information on Learning Clubs see <http://www.selforganisedlearning.com/>

⁷³ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

6. Benefits of engaging in specialised English and maths learning opportunities for people who are homeless

Engaging in basic English and maths learning opportunities can have range of benefits for people who are homeless. These include improved basic skills, but also cover a far broader range of benefits.

6.1. Improved basic English and maths skills

“I needed to address my demons, and accept that I am dyslexic and sort out my spelling. So I came to St Mungo’s Broadway and they’ve been helping me with my literacy and my IT skills.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

All of the clients we interviewed felt their basic skills had improved since participating in learning opportunities at St Mungo’s Broadway, offering examples of the practical use they were able to make of their new skills in their everyday lives.

St Mungo’s Broadway’s Basic Skills team worked with 211 people who were homeless or are at risk of homelessness in 2013/14. More than 80 per cent of clients who have below level 1 literacy or numeracy and work with the team on a regular basis improve these skills by at least one level.

St Mungo’s Broadway has also recently started to offer clients the opportunity to attend our Residential College. St Mungo’s Broadway Residential College provides learning opportunities that are tailored to the needs of people who are homeless, and is the first of its kind in the UK.⁷⁴ In the college’s first term, 100 per cent of the students who had below level 1 English and or maths improved these skills by at least one level.

Case study – Moses’ story

Moses became homeless after being evicted from his flat by the council. He had been visiting his severely ill wife in hospital for several days, but when he returned to his home, he found some friends had broken in and were using it as a drug house. The council took the view that Moses had allowed it and he was forced to sleep rough.

For about six months, Moses lived on the street. He caught pneumonia, and after his wife died in hospital, he struggled to cope, turning to drugs.

“She was like my soul mate. She’d do anything for me. She’d read my letters for me.”

Moses was found sleeping rough by a street outreach team, who brought him in to a St Mungo’s Broadway hostel.

“I had a breakdown and I told him [project worker] I miss my missus and I have trouble reading and writing. I’m over 50 years old and I’d never told anyone that. We talked about it, he said he could put me on to someone who could help me. I was reluctant but he took me to meet Simon [literacy tutor] and we just clicked and from there everything started to click into place.”

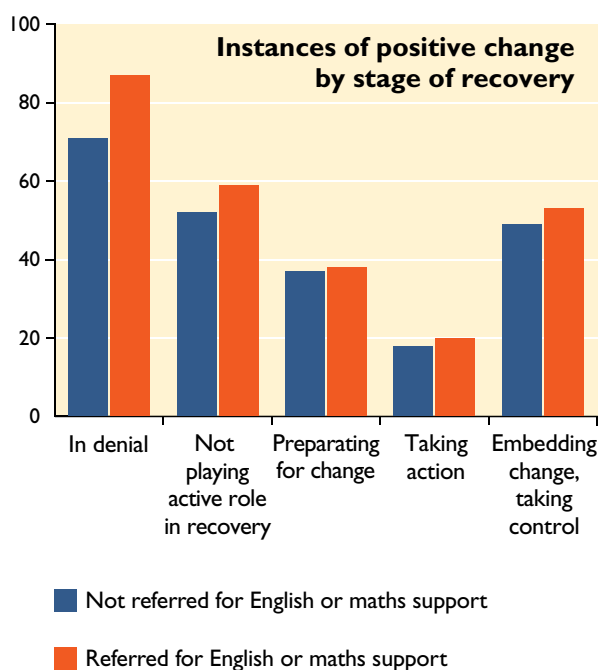
Having struggled with reading since he was a child, improving his literacy skills has had a big impact on Moses’ daily life and is helping him to stay in touch with his family. *“They’re pleased with me learning to keep in contact with them. I used to have this problem with writing. Now I can send them texts.”*

Moses eventually plans to enrol in to college and find housing where his grandchildren can visit him, saying, *“That’s why I have to get my life sorted”.*

⁷⁴ For more information see http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/press_office/1901_volunteers-show-that-reading-matters-at-our-residential-college

6.2. Positive recovery outcomes

Analysis of 1,449 clients who stayed in St Mungo's Broadway accommodation services during the period between 2009 and 2014 shows that clients with an English or maths need who are referred to English or maths training generally make more progress than clients who are not referred to English or maths training (see graph below).



Previous research drawing on interviews with people who are homeless and homelessness agency staff suggest that the benefits of participating in learning include giving structure, purpose and control, improving mental health, reducing harmful behaviours (e.g. substance misuse), meeting new people, increasing self-confidence and building a sense of achievement.⁷⁵

When talking about their experiences of learning at St Mungo's Broadway our interviewees identified a range of positive impacts including improved skill levels and better communication skills. Interviewees also reported that their confidence had improved since engaging in the basic skills support offered by St Mungo's Broadway.

“For someone who does have problems filling out an application form, and they've filled it out and it's looking smart and it's looking lovely. It's a sense of achievement which is recovery based. It's all about building that person's confidence so that they can do it themselves.”

Former St Mungo's Broadway client

6.3. Interest in further learning

Several interviewees expressed a desire to take up further learning following successful engagement with St Mungo's Broadway provision. This included further improving their basic skills and going on to participate in wider skills and learning activities. Previous research has found that taking part in learning delivered by homelessness organisations can open up opportunities, in some cases 'providing a bridge into mainstream education'.⁷⁶

“You never know in the future I might take up some kind of course – [I'm] interested in history – so if they're working with a computer, I'd like to know basic stuff.”

St Mungo's Broadway client

Some of our interviewees explained how they would be keen to progress to further develop their skills once they were happy they had developed basics skills. For one interviewee this new motivation stemmed from their perceived need to get a recognised qualification.

⁷⁵ Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

⁷⁶ Barton, D., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., Tusting, K. and Ivanic, R., published by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2006) Relating adults' lives and learning: participation and engagement in different settings http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=48

“I will eventually need to get a qualification in computers.... I could sit there all day and tap away at a computer... but I do want structure eventually... I will eventually get qualifications for it.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Case study – Barrington’s story

54 year old Barrington spent a period of time sleeping rough in London in 2012. After being referred to a St Mungo’s Broadway hostel, he began a training course in bricklaying and plastering.

Despite making great strides, he was unable to pass a test to gain a CSCS health and safety card. He found reading difficult and his low level of literacy was holding him back.

Barrington began working with a St Mungo’s Broadway tutor and his reading improved so much that he even found himself supporting others in his group. He’s also improved his IT skills, and successfully gained his CSCS health and safety card last summer.

“When I first started the classes, I used to be afraid of the computer. But not any more! I’m really grateful to Simon for helping me to learn how to read. It has given me a new future... I’m looking forward to getting my own place. This and having a job is very important to me and it’s thanks to St Mungo’s Broadway, I’m nearly there.”

6.4. Overcoming drug and alcohol dependency

A large proportion of homeless people have issues with alcohol or substance misuse, which can make engaging in learning difficult, for example substance use issues can impair working memory. Unpredictable and fluctuating conditions, and the need to attend appointments designed to assist wider support needs, can make it difficult to stick to rigid course structures and can hinder concentration.⁷⁷

However, while on one hand these factors may act as barriers to engaging in learning, learning opportunities can also offer a means to overcome drug and alcohol dependency. For people trying to recover from drug/ alcohol dependency, the structure and regular routine that learning may offer can be a strong source of support. For example, through keeping busy and replacing addictive habits with educational ones, and through avoiding spending time with other substance users.⁷⁸

For many of our interviewees, the structure offered by attending learning activities helped them to keep on the path towards recovery from drug/alcohol addiction:

“I think it’s a big help to have somewhere like this to come to instead of doing nothing really. It’s okay going to [relapse prevention] meetings and things like that but... I think a couple of them a day is enough... Sometimes you can go to too many and it can get depressing... but you come here and you learn something every day and you think there’s a spark of hope.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

⁷⁷ Thames Reach (2010) Turning the key <http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/publications/research-reports/turning-the-key/>; Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

⁷⁸ Barton, D., Appleby, Y., Hodge, R., Tusting, K. and Ivanic, R., published by The National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (2006) Relating adults’ lives and learning: participation and engagement in different settings; http://www.nrdc.org.uk/publications_details.asp?ID=48; Luby, J. and Welch, J., published by Crisis (2006) Missed opportunities: the case for investment in learning and skills for homeless people

“I was drinking a lot but since I came here to learn the computer I realised that if I continue drinking I would not be able to get what I want. Because I can’t drink and then come and sit on the computer. When the officer or anybody is telling me what to do I can blow the fumes onto the person, which is not nice. If you are drunk you can’t cope with the computer very well.....As of now I have stopped [drinking] totally.”

St Mungo’s Broadway client

Helping people who are homeless to develop basic English and maths skills can improve their chances of achieving personal objectives and making a broader recovery from homelessness. It can also help to secure a range of Government objectives, especially around housing, work and health. Homelessness, unemployment and health problems are expensive for the taxpayer. Investing in effective basic English and maths skills learning opportunities can help people to overcome these problems, leading to future savings for public services.

Conclusion

This report has found that 51 per cent of people who are homeless lack basic English skills, and 55 per cent lack basic maths skills. Homelessness makes it harder to learn new skills, and can itself deskill people. Being unable to read write or do basic maths makes it harder to find work, use digital technology and to recover from homelessness.

People who are homeless often find themselves excluded from public services, including adult English and maths skills services. This is because the skills funding system makes it extremely difficult for providers

to deliver the flexible and resource intensive learning opportunities required by people who need more support than most to learn.

The Government should be credited with recognising that these sorts of issues exist, and for starting to take action to address these issues. At St Mungo’s Broadway, we are committed to doing what we can to support our clients to do more to improve their skills. However, until Government takes action on a larger scale, a lack of English and maths skills will continue to trap people in homelessness and disadvantage.

Recommendations

8. Recommendations to Government

8.1. Government should make a long term commitment to fund English and maths programmes, which are designed for people who are homeless.

St Mungo's Broadway endorses the Skills and Enterprise Minister's statement that there are "*few better uses of education funding than to support English, maths, and IT skills for homeless people.*"⁷⁹ The STRIVE pilot is a promising step that the Government has taken to deliver on its commitment to "*prioritise access to further education and skills services for the most disadvantaged, including homeless people.*"⁸⁰ However, this report demonstrates that the current skills funding system means that people who are homeless have few opportunities to improve their English and maths and that a longer term, sustainable solution is needed.

St Mungo's Broadway calls on Government to commit to funding a long term solution to providing English and maths programmes for people who are homeless. Such a solution would accrue benefits to multiple Government departments, including the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department of Health.

Possible funding models for English and maths programmes for people who are homeless include:

8.1.1. A distinct long term national programme, outside of the Adult Skills Budget (ASB), which supports people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills, as well as to progress into other training or education and to become more employable. Such a programme could draw on learning from the Government's vocational reform plan⁸¹ and encourage providers to deliver non qualification based outcomes.

OR

8.1.2. Adapting ASB funding to provide learning opportunities to people who are homeless, which recognise ongoing progress in improving English and maths skills, rather than only recognising the completion of courses and qualifications. In addition, ASB funding mechanisms would recognise that delivering effective learning opportunities to people who are homeless is relatively resource intensive due to their learning and support needs. The adapted funding approach would therefore offer higher payments in order to reflect the costs of delivering effective learning opportunities to people who are homeless.⁸²

8.2. Government should commit to working with homelessness agencies to expand the STRIVE pilot

St Mungo's Broadway applauds the Government for supporting the STRIVE pre employment skills pilot, which is delivered in partnership by St Mungo's Broadway and Crisis. It is envisaged that STRIVE will support at least 100 people who are homeless to improve their English and maths skills and improve their employability. STRIVE is also designed to secure outcomes in policy areas that are the responsibility of a number of Government departments, including homelessness, work and adult skills.

⁷⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-support-to-give-homeless-basic-building-blocks-for-work>

⁸⁰ HM Government (2011) Vision to end rough sleeping: No second night out nationwide https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

⁸¹ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2014) Getting the job done: the Government's reform plan for vocational qualifications https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/286749/bis-14-577-vocational-qualification-reform-plan.pdf

⁸² The Government's Work Programme pays providers more to provide employment training to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who are identified as homeless (they are included in payment group three). For more details see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/306484/wp-pg-chapter-2.pdf

STRIVE should be rolled out to additional geographical areas with high concentrations of people who are homeless. Running STRIVE in a number of areas could allow for different approaches to long term funding to be piloted, in addition to the grant funded model used for the London pilot. Expanding STRIVE would also enable more people who are homeless to improve their English and maths.

Ongoing evaluation of STRIVE will record how participants benefit and gather learning from the pilot. Government should also commit to extending the London STRIVE pilot for another year, in order to better enable learning from previous years to be put into practice.

8.3. Government should scope the size of need and potential demand for basic English and maths skills provision for people who are homeless.⁸³

This report has given an indication of the scale of the English and maths skills needs among people who are homeless. However, measurement on a larger, national scale would facilitate calculating the resources and funding required to meet this need across the country and should be undertaken by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and or the Department for Communities and Local Government.

8.4. If people who are homeless are required to attend training in order to receive benefits, then Government must ensure that this training is compatible with their learning and wider support needs.

As shown in this report, there is currently insufficient effective English and maths training available for people who are homeless. It is essential that requirements are only placed on a person to engage in English and maths training when the provision that they are required to participate in is likely to be effective. People who are homeless should not have to choose between attending

training which is incompatible with their learning and broader support needs or having their benefits sanctioned.

Requiring people who are homeless to attend courses that are inappropriate is a waste of public money. It is also a waste of time, which could be better spent participating in more useful work and learning related activity that increases chances of succeeding on welfare to work programmes. As shown in this report, poor experiences of learning can put people off participating in learning in future.

The Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary stated in January 2014 that *“those who don't have the skills they need for a job will have to take up training alongside their job search or lose their benefits”*.⁸⁴ St Mungo's Broadway calls on all political parties to explicitly state that people who are homeless will only be required to attend English and maths training which is compatible with their learning and wider support needs.

8.5. BIS and DCLG should encourage local authorities to better coordinate Community Learning and supported accommodation services.

Community Learning funding supports informal learning activities designed to help people of different ages and backgrounds get a new skill, reconnect with learning, follow an interest and prepare to progress to formal courses.⁸⁵ Community Learning can enable people to develop the confidence and motivation needed to engage in English and maths learning opportunities.

Local authorities commission both Community Learning and supported accommodation services. Participating in Community Learning can help people achieve outcomes that local authorities may require supported accommodation providers to work towards, including participation in leisure and cultural learning, improving mental health and entering work or training.

⁸³ This recommendation builds on a recommendation made by Gray, R., published by NIACE (2013) *Helpful approaches to the delivery of English and maths provision for unemployed adults* <http://shop.niace.org.uk/english-maths-provision-unemployed-adults.html>

⁸⁴ See a speech given by Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to the IPPR on January 20 2014 <http://press.labour.org.uk/post/73937630140/rachel-reeves-a-one-nation-approach-to-social-security>

⁸⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/community-learning-government-funding>

However, in St Mungo's Broadway's experience, local authority commissioned Community Learning and supported accommodation services are rarely joined up. Joining up these services could help both types of service to better achieve their aims.

8.6. The Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English should explore effective models of learning and ways to motivate people who are homeless.

In April 2014, Skills and Enterprise Minister Matthew Hancock announced the creation of a new Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English. The Centre will look at how best to motivate people to improve their English and maths and how to develop models of learning that have the flexibility to fit with people's lives.⁸⁶

Many people who are homeless lack basic English and maths skills due to a lack of sufficiently flexible learning opportunities. The Behavioural Insights Research Centre for Maths and English should build on the findings of this report, and learning from the STRIVE pilot, to further develop effective models of learning and ways to motivate people who are homeless.

9. Recommendations to agencies that work with people who are homeless

St Mungo's Broadway recognises that our services have an important role to play in supporting clients to improve their English and maths skills. Doing so will ensure that clients have more opportunities in life and enable clients to make more progress in their recovery from homelessness.

St Mungo's Broadway is therefore committed to implementing a basic skills strategy across our services. We will work to incorporate the actions set out below into our services, and encourage other homelessness services providers to consider taking similar actions:

9.1. Identify and address English and maths needs in service delivery

- Facilitate screening and assessments at key points in the support pathway
- Better and more consistently record and monitor need
- Embed English and maths learning in all aspects of support work – take advantage of opportunities to incorporate learning which arise throughout support work, for example when explaining hostel licence agreements or calculating how much rent clients can afford to pay when they move into independent accommodation
- Work to ensure that clients have functional English, maths and IT skills before they resettle in to independent accommodation.

9.2. Develop staff capacity

- Train staff to be alert to, and identify, clients' basic skills needs
- Encourage and enable staff to develop their own English and maths skills, where needed.

9.3. Raise awareness of the relationship between poor English and maths skills and homelessness

- Raise awareness of needs and impact of a lack of English and maths skills with local authorities, central Government, other funders FE colleges and other learning providers.

⁸⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-sets-up-world-leading-adult-literacy-and-numeracy-research-centre>



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