



**ADVICE & THOUGHTS FROM PEOPLE
WHO HAVE ESCAPED HOMELESSNESS**

**THIS IS A NOTEBOOK
PLEASE MAKE USE OF IT!**

THE ESCAPE PLAN

We have all been homeless. We have all moved on. It was tough, the hardest thing we have ever done, but we did it, we escaped.

You can do it too.

Each of our stories is individual, separate, our own, but when we compared our journeys we found shared experiences, common themes, threads that bonded us together. We realised we are not alone.

The Escape Plan captures our experiences, what we learned, our mistakes, our realisations. We put this all together, some might call it accumulated wisdom, we call it lived experience.

We know that we do not have all the answers, but we think we have uncovered the right questions. There is no one single path out of homelessness, but by finding your own answers to these questions you might find your own way.

We are hoping that you find the Escape Plan inspiring and useful, and most of all, we hope you escape too.



Meet some of the Escapees...

PAUL

Rent arrears led to eviction and homelessness. Now manager in the hospitality industry

JOHN

Abusive step father, drugs and rough sleeping. Now volunteers for an arts charity

STEVEN

Drug dealing, homeless, rebuilt family and now working for Turning Point

FAROUK

Drink & drugs resulted in homelessness. Now has own place and working in catering industry

FRANCOIS

Slept rough, homeless, then got an MBA and got a book published

MARK

Addiction and challenging behaviour led to prison. Rebuilt life-now street outreach worker

PRAKASH

Optician with own business, then mental health problems, homelessness. Now chair of local charity

TERRY

Homeless and prison – now a theatre director

KRISTINA

Troubled upbringing, drugs, crime. Hostel supported her to university, now in a professional career

MARTIN

Drinking, gambling, black market trading resulted in homelessness. Now married and running own business

SHARON

Rough sleeper on/off for 5 years. Now a professional housing worker

ROBERT

Successful photographer then homeless. Now a successful photographer again



CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS YOURSELF

"I realised I am in the driving seat and no one else."

"When I was homeless I didn't think I had lost my dignity. I really didn't. I didn't think I had lost anything. It wasn't until I had become clean that I realised then how much I had lost."

CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS YOURSELF



We found that taking responsibility for ourselves and for our situation was the starting point. Only you and you alone can start the journey, but when you do, others will help you.

What do you take responsibility for?



Self-esteem, self-worth, pride - these are essential. But it's a balance. Most of us did not have enough of it, but some had too much, and were too proud to ask for help. It can be the bravest thing you will ever do if you ask for help.

What are you proud of?



Sometimes we found it difficult to be honest. Especially when others around us, including services sometimes, were encouraging us to be deceptive. Mostly, we found it easier to move forward when we were finally being honest.

What are you honest with yourself about?



CHANGING ATTITUDES TOWARDS YOURSELF



You may well have trouble trusting people, like most of us. Part of the reason you came to be where you are now is that probably someone, or many people, have let you down... badly. But it is important to learn, or re-learn how to trust. People have to earn that trust, but you need to give them a chance to earn it.

Who will you give a chance to earn your trust?



Don't give up hope. Remember your dreams. Don't give up hope. Don't give up hope.

What are your hopes and dreams?



Some of us found strength in a higher power, embraced different kinds of spirituality that helped us to forgive ourselves. Some spotted 'signs', that helped us start again. That stuff did not go down well with all of us. Each to their own. But please find a way to forgive yourself.

What gives you strength?



GET TOGETHER & GET BUSY



VOLUNTEERING

GROUP WORK

TRAINING

I'LL HELP

"I think the whole giving back, the volunteering side of things, has been a good way of, you know, kind of puts your kind of stuff in perspective. Because sometimes you realise that you are not the only one with problems."

"Bearing your soul in a group is difficult. But you know what comes out of it is the relief and then the understanding of who you are"

GET TOGETHER & GET BUSY



Getting involved in a regular activity was vital for a lot of us, things like training, education, arts or sports. These helped give us a sense of belonging, of direction, structure to our day, got rid of boredom, re-built our self-esteem and our confidence.

What would you like to be doing with your day?



A lot of us did volunteering. This was a chance to give something back, show people that we had something to offer, that we were needed. You are needed.

How would you give something back?



We also found groups really useful. Some of us were cynical about group work and then found it better than we expected. It is not for everyone, but it worked for enough of us to recommend it.

Are there any groups you might join?



MAKING THE MOST OF WORKERS & SERVICES



For those of us that found a good support worker, that relationship was really valuable. You may well not find one person who has everything, but maybe you can get what you need between a few different people.



If you are using a service that you rate - make the most of it, give something back, get involved. But if a service is making your situation worse, making you feel bad about yourself, remember you can always walk away.

ROCK BOTTOM



"When I hit that point, and I am like right I really want to change, you all have to be there for me."




Quite a few of us felt we hit rock bottom before we started turning things around. Not all of us needed to hit rock bottom, so don't feel you have to, but if you are there - draw strength from it and see it as a starting point for making changes.

How can you start to make changes?



PEER PERSPECTIVES & CLIENT INVOLVEMENT



"Our group comes together - it's main primary aim is to give clients a say... the therapeutic aspect, the increased confidence, the social networks that begin to develop out of that."

EXPERIENCE

PEER PERSPECTIVE & CLIENT INVOLVEMENT



Seek out the advice of people who have had similar experiences to you. Listen when you are challenged by them, but also take care not to be preached at (we hope we're not doing that now!)

Who do you know who might have advice to share?



Client involvement is a way to have a say in the services you use. Your experience is unique and valuable - you have something worth saying, to make things better for those who come after you. A lot of us found that doing client involvement really helped us move on.

Do you know any involvement groups, client forums, or residents meetings?



RECOGNISING THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY & FRIENDS



If you can, try and keep in contact with family and old friends. Some of our relationships with our families were too far gone, but most of us found a lot of strength by rebuilding these.

Who are the family and old friends you want to be in touch with?



Some of us made some new really strong friendships and relationships whilst we were homeless. People you can turn to, be there for you, challenge you, but who you can be open with. Watch how you can lift each other, but take care not to pull each other down.

Who do you want as your friends?

COMING TO TERMS WITH BEING HOMELESS



"People are very astounded about homelessness because I speak about it with a very positive turn on it. And for me it was quite positive because it gave me a sense of myself and who I actually am."

COMING TO TERMS WITH BEING HOMELESS



Do not be ashamed of being homeless, we're not. Not now anyway. But take care that the label 'homeless' does not hold you back. We all feel that we have learned a lot from being homeless, both good and bad. Never forget that before you are a homeless person - you are a person.

We escaped. You can too.

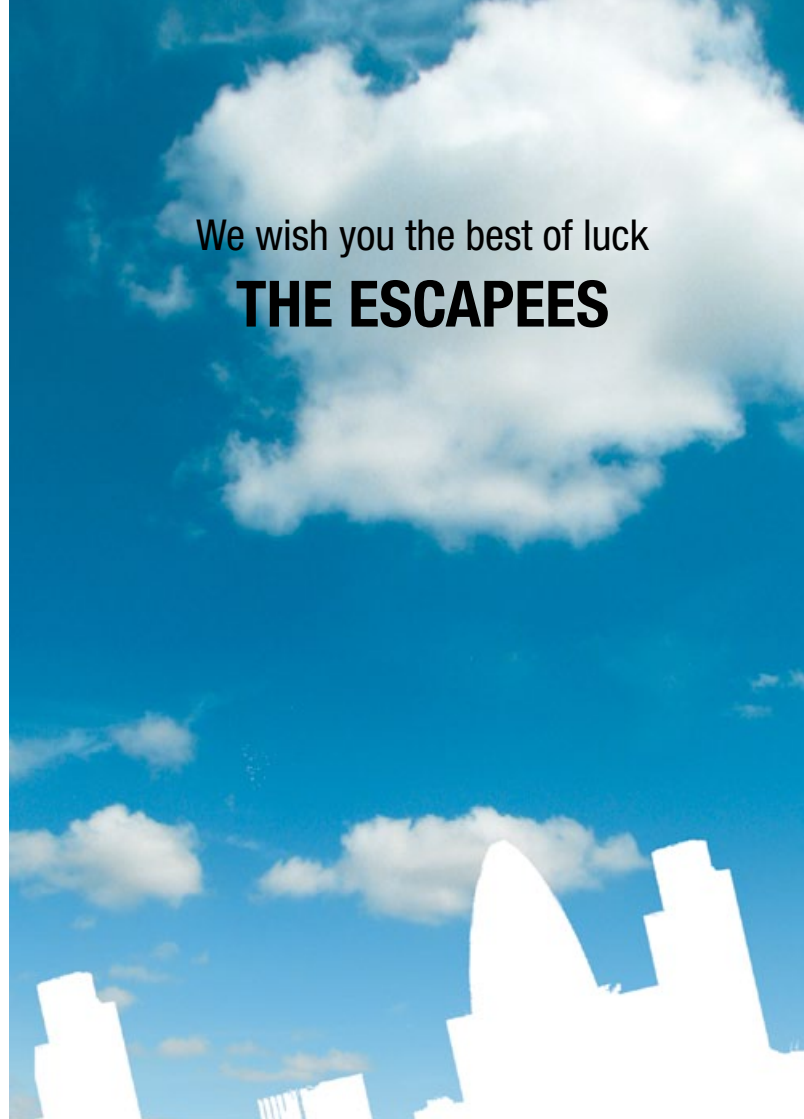
Don't give up hope.

Don't give up hope.

What is your Escape Plan?

We wish you the best of luck

THE ESCAPEES



The Escape Plan is a piece of peer-led research created by Groundswell. Interviews were conducted by Andrew Campbell and Michael Spike Hudson, both of whom are professional researchers who have personal experience of homelessness.

Together with Mike Seal, Head of Youth and Community Department at Newman University, they created a set of techniques and definitions for interviewing 25 people who have been homeless, yet who have all now moved on. They also interviewed a series of 'significant others' for each interviewee, that is people who helped them on their journeys out of homelessness, including workers in services, friends, family members and partners. The analysis of the interviews was led by Mike, with input from the researchers and other Groundswell staff, Simone Hellenen and Athol Halle, who also helped devise and manage this research. All those involved in the research then came together to assess and hone our findings at verification focus groups.

This booklet is a summary of our findings and has been designed by Dylan Byrne of Bogstandard. You can download the full report of the Escape Plan at www.groundswell.org.uk. Where you will also find a short film made by Rachel Harvie through the Media Trust.

This work was generously funded by City Parochial Foundation and the Ashden Trust, and would not have been possible without the support of Thames Reach and Homeless Link, who all contributed to a guiding Advisory Group along with Geoffrey Randall.

Our thanks go to everyone involved, the significant others, who gave their time and wisdom, and most of all our phenomenal respect and heartfelt thanks goes to the remarkable Escapees...

To find homelessness services go to: www.homelesslondon.org
For more information on Groundswell please visit: www.groundswell.org.uk.



THE ESCAPE PLAN

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This is a notebook – please make use of it!

The Escape Plan has been created for people who are experiencing homelessness to try and help you move on in your life.

Researchers with their own experience of homelessness interviewed people who have all been homeless, and have now moved on - to discover the essential things that helped people make their remarkable journeys out of homelessness.

This notebook includes reflections, quotes and questions to help you devise your own Escape Plan.

The Escape Plan was created by Groundswell, a charity which exists to enable homeless and vulnerable people to take more control of their lives, have a greater influence on the services they use and to play a full role in their communities.



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