Bringing Voices in from the Cold: Analysing the Efficacy of Asset-Based Community Development in a Voluntary Homelessness Organisation

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Central Lancashire

June 2016

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and evaluates the usefulness of asset-based community development (ABCD) to develop opportunities for participation with homeless people. Current research suggests that asset-based ways of working can promote effective alternatives to needs-based procedures and engage service users within health and social care production and delivery. ABCD may be defined as a process whereby underutilised local community 'assets' are drawn together to deliver social and economic benefits (McKnight and Block, 2012). However, little research into the applicability of ABCD has yet been undertaken with homeless people and associated non-statutory agencies.

The research was undertaken within a small homelessness charity primarily operated by volunteers. As a volunteer within the charity I undertook a critical action research inspired approach into exploring the benefits of and challenges involved in using ABCD as a method of facilitating increased involvement of homeless people in a food distribution project, and investigated the wider applicability and challenges of ABCD as a means of enhancing involvement of homeless people. The strengths and weaknesses of undertaking participatory research and the issues around combining the roles of volunteer and researcher are reflected upon to share knowledge and experience of action research.

Through undertaking this research as a process of investigation into how a homelessness organisation implements ABCD combined with a critical reflection of the role of the researcher as participant observer a rich and detailed insight into the research aims has been discerned. The research increases understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of ABCD in practice with a marginalised group and shows notions of a 'homeless community' and a 'culture of homelessness' to be of negative value in assisting homeless people to become more engaged within the community. It highlights the need for a more critical form of ABCD incorporating notions of power. In conjunction, it has enhanced opportunities for homeless people to engage and influenced practice within the charity.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Tony Martin, a man who championed the cause of homeless people everywhere and who was a loyal friend. Unfortunately Tony did not live to see some of the positive benefits the research has brought to Help the Homeless, and the people it serves, but his unwavering support and unshakeable belief in people contributed enormously to the research and sustained me throughout the research.

I would like to thank my supervisory team for being a constant source of advice and support throughout the study: Mark Dooris, for believing in me enough to give me the chance to undertake the research and for allowing me the space to develop the research around my core beliefs; Mark Foord, a mentor and friend; Fiona Dykes, for helping me survive the rigors of writing up my methodology; and Paul Reid, for his generosity of time and critical voice.

Thank you to my wife, Katherine, for always being there and for her unwavering support; to my boys, Felix and Max – daddy promises to spend more time with you now; to Bren Cook, a special thank you in recognition for all the coffee, bad jokes and the listening ear – you have been a key part of this research; and to all my students at Runshaw who showed an interest in this research. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and admiration to Ian Tolson for his honesty and generosity, and for demonstrating the power of friendship and community to overcome the odds.

Finally and most importantly a heartfelt thank you to all the people at Help the Homeless and particularly all the homeless people who participated. I hope that together we can use this research in some way to collaborate and promote positive change.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Help the Homeless Research Project Background

Chorley Help the Homeless (HtH) is a charity that supports homeless people, and those facing the threat of homelessness, within the Chorley area. HtH has struggled to continue to develop and deliver its services to homeless people for a number of years and wished to investigate methods of promoting service user involvement and organisational change. As a long-serving volunteer at HtH, I undertook this research project as the basis for my PhD.

Historically, HtH has operated on a shoestring budget and, without wishing to sound judgemental, the management style and process would best be described as taking a 'leave it alone' approach and dealing with issues and crises as they arose. A cooperation agreement with the local United Reform Church (URC) reached in April 2012 and the appointment of the Reverend of this church as Chair of the board of HtH led to a more structured managerial approach, and hence the opportunity to undertake this research. The overarching aim of this research was to evaluate the understanding and impact of recently implemented asset-based working strategies and practices throughout the organisation**.** This research focuses on how an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) initiative impacts upon the services received by homeless people, the working practices of staff and volunteers, and any positive or negative effects upon the outcomes as defined and reported by staff, volunteers and homeless people. The following research aims and objectives were developed to explore this extensive question:

Aims

1. To explore the benefits of, and challenges involved in, using ABCD as a method of facilitating increased involvement of homeless service users in a food distribution project.
2. To investigate the wider applicability of the ABCD based model as a means of enhancing service user involvement of homeless people.
3. To critically examine the theoretical assumptions underpinning ABCD and detail how they impact upon ABCD in practice.

Objectives

1. To increase understanding of ABCD as a strategy for facilitating homeless service user involvement.

2. To develop a detailed understanding of the experience and perceptions of homeless service users regarding the implementation of an ABCD approach.

3. To examine the perceptions of employed and voluntary project staff in relation to ABCD.

4. To examine the impact of ABCD on homeless service users and voluntary staff at the level of the micro (personal interactions), meso (organisational norms and operations) and the macro (interactions with the wider community and other statutory/third sector organisations).

5. To increase understanding of the barriers and challenges for homeless people to participate actively as service users.

1.2   The Research Space and Extending an Original Contribution to Knowledge

The majority of asset-based research has taken place in the United States and/or in the context of public health and well-being (Foot & Hopkins, 2010; Sigerson & Gruer, 2011; Foot, 2012) with little undertaken specifically in the realm of homelessness. Research exploring the asset-based model when applied specifically to homeless service users, in a British context, provides evidence to extend the existing knowledge base in asset-based and homelessness service user participatory contexts. Through seeking to critique the impact of asset-based methods for homeless service users this research engages with the debate around methods of empowerment and the opportunities and limits for individuals and community groups to drive social change.

Current policy is linked to the ideology of community and third sector/charity based service provision. ABCD has application to increase user involvement and present homeless groups/organisations with alternative models to becoming statutory welfare service replacements, or conversely, to be used as a means for increasing the responsibility of individuals and communities to provide and manage their own forms

of social welfare. This research provides a resource for future investigations to draw from and expand upon the possible benefits and issues around using ABCD with marginalised groups and communities. ABCD is contingent upon context and holds a complex and varied set of meanings and my research highlights these issues within theory and practice.

This chapter will begin by providing an overview of the organisation (HtH) within which the research took place and provide a brief introduction to the rationale of the research. It will continue through detailing my personal reasons for undertaking the research and an insight into my own personal biography and how this shapes my view of community. The chapter will conclude with a synopsis of the following chapters.

1.3   Help the Homeless: Overview

The main functions of HtH are to provide emergency relief for those who are homeless/facing homelessness and to deliver housing/benefit advice for all in need in the Chorley area. The service also operates an early intervention initiative that delivers mediation and counselling services free of charge that is open to all members of the local community. During the course of the research, a number of illustrative photographs were taken of the research sites. However, please note that due to concerns over privacy and the well-being of participants and non-participants, it was not possible to take photographs of some areas that were consistently occupied (for example, the United Reform Church supper club and the HtH outside yard area).

The charity currently delivers services from a converted terraced house situated in the centre of Chorley in Lancashire (see Picture 1, page 296). The building comprises a small reception area with a narrow waiting area, having no seating due to a lack of space (see Picture 2, page 297). The receptionist is situated in an office behind a partitioned glass screen, which means that initial contact has to be carried out through a barrier. Requests for food are managed through the reception and it has been raised that people seeking assistance may be uncomfortable and embarrassed that other people may be present when they make their request for assistance. The rest of the lower floor comprises a small kitchen area and toilet facilities. The two main interview rooms, along with an office for the advisors/volunteers are situated up a flight of stairs

(see Picture 3, page 297), which is problematic for those with health or mobility issues and often means that people experiencing these issues are interviewed in the kitchen area, which raises issues of confidentiality and privacy (see Pictures 4 & 5, page 298). Volunteers and service users commented that they felt the atmosphere of the building was "*dark," "dingy"* and *"oppressive."* Overall the building is considered unsuitable for the work undertaken due to poor access, insufficient space and client privacy issues, but, due to the fact that the charity is financially vulnerable and the building is provided on the basis of a very nominal rent from Chorley Borough Council, it is considered functional. As with many charities within the sector the reality of operating within a climate of scarce resources and with a client group who are not always considered as a top priority for the allocation of resources, a certain level of being able to operate in less than ideal circumstances may become an accepted position. The impact of the environment at HtH upon volunteers and homeless people will be explored in greater depth throughout the thesis.

HtH is primarily an organisation run by volunteers with only one paid member of staff, a part-time office manager/service coordinator. The number of active volunteers working within the organisation at the beginning of 2013 numbered twenty-eight – sixteen female and fourteen male volunteers. Their ages range from seventeen to eighty years old; the majority falling into the age bracket of forty to sixty years old. Volunteers undertake a variety of roles with three working as receptionists, eight as housing/benefit advisors, four in the roles of counsellors/mediators, four preparing and packing food parcels and the remainder covering general duties.

HtH originally delivered services from 9am to 2.30pm from Monday to Friday inclusive. However, it had to cut its working hours in 2013 due to funding constraints, and has been closed on Wednesdays as a result. Historically, HtH has offered no weekend or night services. However, through links with the URC, breakfast and supper clubs (open to all in the community) are now jointly operated and delivered over three days from the church building. The free meal services are well attended with an average of 24 people per session accessing the supper clubs throughout 2013/2014.

1.4   Help the Homeless: History

Help the Homeless was established in 1993 by a group of local Chorley volunteers with input from the faith-based community. The original remit of the organisation was to:

'Relieve poverty and distress amongst homeless or previously homeless people and relieve homelessness within the Chorley borough.'

The use of the terminology *'relieve poverty and distress'* encapsulates the Christian faith-based beliefs of the founder members, some of whom remain active by serving on the board or within the charity, and their views on working with people in need out of a spirit of Christian duty and promoting a moral ideal of caring for others and a sense of social justice remain largely unchanged (Cloke et al, 2007). These aims have been increasingly challenged due to the changing nature of national and local homelessness policy towards a more preventative approach which has been problematic for HtH to embrace. This has been due, in part, to its founder members wishing to maintain their core beliefs and working practices, whilst the diversity of views held by volunteers, and homeless people, has altered. A number of volunteers have challenged the way that HtH works and the notion of 'helping' the homeless, including suggesting a name change and revisiting the mission statement; however, thus far these changes have been resisted by the board.

HtH began as a relatively small charity that operated purely on the strength of voluntary commitment and donations from the local community. The initial function of the charity was to source and distribute food and household items to homeless people or those suffering distress. The management committee was composed of volunteers within the charity and supporters from the local community and operated on a very informal basis. The organisation became recognised within the town as successful in delivering services to those defined as 'hard to reach' or in 'primary need' and attracted larger sources of external funding. The charity gained access to its present location with the support of Chorley Borough Council, and expanded services delivered through employing paid support and advice workers.

HtH was commissioned to deliver floating support services, which aimed to work with formerly homeless people through operating an outreach service aimed at assisting them to manage and maintain their tenancies. This service was funded via a

Supporting People contract to undertake this work (The National Archives, 2012). From 2000, HtH operated the following projects:

- An accommodation finding service, including a database of private landlords for priority referrals.
- Housing rights and advocacy service, delivered by paid housing advisors with access to legal advice offered through drop in sessions via Shelter or a housing rights solicitor who visits the project.
- An emergency food bank for homeless people and provision of clothing, sleeping bags, toiletries and other essentials.
- A furniture collection and redistribution project operated through a warehouse leased by the organisation.
- A tenant support team who offered a full floating support package of care and advice to re-housed homeless people in need of support.
- A charity shop operated to raise funds via selling donated goods.
- A community mediation service operated at a separate site within the town and used to assist families in conflict to prevent homelessness.

During the operation of the Supporting People contract HtH employed a full-time senior housing advice officer, four full-time support workers, a full-time mediation manager and two part-time reception/clerical assistants.

In 2006, HtH lost the Supporting People contract following a competitive tender process and, owing to its reliance upon this source of funding, entered a sustained period of crisis. The four support workers were made redundant and the tenant support service collapsed due to a lack of resources. HtH withdrew to delivering a core service of housing advice and advocacy, alongside its funded mediation service. Unfortunately, sources of funding for housing advice became increasingly difficult to access, and all paid positions, barring that of the funded mediation manager's post, ceased in 2009.

The charity continued to deliver the furniture distribution service, housing advice and run the charity shop; however, losses continued to be incurred and reserves were depleted. As a response to these challenging circumstances a grant was obtained from the National Lottery to employ researchers from the University of Central Lancashire

to undertake an evaluation and highlight possible future courses of action (Foord & Drummond, 2009).

The research recommendations outlined that HtH should undertake the following:

- Establish a clear and focussed aim and objective for the organisation.
- Strengthen the current board/management and implement an updated set of policies and procedures.
- Withdraw, at least as a temporary measure, from providing unfunded or loss-making services; these being the charity shop, furniture distribution service and certain areas of advice.
- Re-focus upon providing early intervention, through mediation and targeted advice and advocacy for a selected group – those classed as having complex needs.
- Strengthen relationships with Chorley Borough Council and partner agencies and recognise that previous ways of working are viewed as 'antagonistic' by prospective partner agencies (Foord & Drummond, 2009).

The research findings proved painful for many within the organisation, and a level of denial and a siege mentality was experienced throughout the charity. There was recognition in the research that HtH could improve its strategies for increasing the role of homeless people within the organisation, and that this may assist in the generation of revenue, a point that was generally well received and was instrumental in the process of seeking methods for including homeless people within the future construction and delivery of services. During the period of the evaluation approaches had been made to Fylde Coast YMCA (FCYMCA) exploring the possibility of a merger. With the publication of the research findings and the departure of some key members of the charity due to their advanced age and ill health, it was decided that a merger with FCYMCA presented the greatest chance of saving the charity from closure.

HtH merged with FCYMCA in 2010 and a new strategic plan was implemented. FCYMCA/HtH developed a social enterprise project aimed at recycling used furniture. The social enterprise would be used to collect furniture donations and recycle them for either resale, through a charity shop, or scrap value. The merger and plan to diversify

into this line of work was highly contested by a majority of those working for HtH and was felt to be moving away from the core ethos of HtH. Unfortunately the social enterprise did not meet the financial criteria necessary for it to continue in operation and it was closed down in 2012, with a substantial financial deficit. Around the same time it was also decided that the merger between the two organisations had not been a positive one and an agreed split took place. HtH could not continue in its current form and was in danger of closing until the committee, with support of the URC, agreed to close and re-launch the charity with a reduced working remit under the name Chorley Help the Homeless. The restructure included the closure of the charity shop and the loss of a paid manager of the mediation service. It was at this point that the committee decided that now was the time for a radical rethink into how HtH worked and what its primary objectives should be. Due to my involvement with previous research projects I was approached by the board to undertake a service evaluation and provide possible models to assist HtH to develop a strategy for taking the organisation forward.

During my research I highlighted the position that HtH had developed little or no opportunity to involve service users within the organisation. The URC were particularly interested in promoting involvement and inclusion for homeless people and requested information on theories and actions that could be drawn upon to develop this. I had a working knowledge of and interest in asset-based community development as a possible method of engaging homeless people and this coincided with the opportunity to undertake a PhD in promoting service user involvement at the University of Central Lancashire.

1.5   *The Importance of Language*

The words and terms we use are not simply neutral devices for communication. I am aware that we develop our language within the social and cultural spaces that we inhabit. Through social and cultural exposure throughout our daily lives we may come to use words and terms in a way that we believe to be unproblematic and simply the norm. To illustrate, through working at HtH for an extended period of time I have found myself talking about 'the homeless', as if homeless people constituted a generic

and homogenous set of people. For me terms such as 'homelessness' and particularly 'the homeless' are charged with presuppositions and underlying themes related to categorising and possibly stigmatising people. However, we need to use certain types of terminology to try and make sense of and communicate our thoughts. With this in mind I shall refer to homeless people and if I use the term 'the homeless' is it with the knowledge that I accept that the term can have multiple connotations. In a similar light the term 'service user' has become an accepted label, superseding the more passive label of 'client'. I am uneasy with the consumerist connotations attached to the label (Carr, 2007) and will use the term sparingly and with reservations. The nature and composition of community is explored through the research. The ideas surrounding the notion of a 'culture of homelessness' or a 'homeless community' will be highlighted as such terms may hold both positive and negative value for homeless people, dependent upon the context in which they are deployed (Ravenhill, 2008).

The research will draw upon ideas of need and dependency and how these are constructed and understood. Again, as a volunteer at HtH the word dependency is often used in simple terms to state that an individual has certain needs. However, the term dependency can be disempowering and reduce the agency and personhood of an individual. HtH achieves some life-changing results through working with homeless people intensively over an extensive period of time. Indeed, the rejection of applying any notion of time-limited working with homeless people is fundamental to its ethos and working practice. However, ABCD views overly paternalistic/maternalistic services and relationships as problematic and argues that they may restrict a homeless person's options and opportunities for self-development (McKnight & Block, 2012). The nature of the relationships between volunteers and homeless people at HtH and how they impact both positively and negatively on levels of engagement and participation will be examined throughout the thesis.

1.6 Working with Homeless Services Users: Current Approaches

HtH policies towards working with homeless people are often premised by the notion that homeless people present a specific 'need' which they are tasked to meet. This 'need' takes the form of finding accommodation for homeless clients and providing

assistance with accessing the basic life essentials necessary for daily living, such as food or clothing (NHS North West, 2011).

However, it has been accepted by some people within HtH that this needs-led approach may contribute to defining people as dependent and lacking in agency, and detract attention from the wider social and psychological needs of homeless people (Seager, 2011). There has been a realisation that this approach is not necessarily beneficial to service users and thus change has been sought through incorporating ABCD working. Within this HtH has struggled to access funding streams to maintain and develop services for the homeless. It is believed that a lack of a coherent strategy promoting the involvement and inclusion of homeless people within service delivery has been a major factor in restricting the organisation's access to financial support.

1.7   Moving Beyond a Deficit Needs-Led Model: Asset-Based Community Development

John McKnight, a founder of the ABCD approach, views modern definitions of 'need' as excessive, disempowering and often driven by the professional's 'need' to create and maintain a compliant and servile client base to support an expanding service industry (McKnight, 1995). Evidence suggests recognition of the weaknesses in the needs-based model:

> 'Currently professionals and service users get resources on the basis of needs, therefore, it is inevitable that needs are the primary focus. Needs are often based on the assumption that people require professional input, which will improve their health and well-being. However, with the ever growing volume of "needs" the future sustainability of this approach is questionable' (NHS Northwest, 2011, p.27).

Homeless people do present with often desperate and immediate needs. However, the majority served by HtH are those that statutory services have classified as not meeting requirements; commonly 'these people' are considered to be 'out of duty' for local authority housing or support. This means that under the current homelessness legislation they are often entitled only to advisory and non-statutory services, which

are often under-resourced and patchy in provision. An asset-based approach may provide an alternative for those that the deficit model finds difficult to assist through drawing on a collaborative approach involving a wider circle of community partners and offering the possibility for individuals to take a greater role in service provision and delivery. Homeless people involved with HtH food projects report psychological and material benefits from developing networks and skills (Dunleavy, Kennedy & Vaandrager, 2012).

Farrell (2012) theorises that, among those labelled as 'chronic homeless', a certain psychology of adaptation takes place that can make accessing statutory services appear of negative benefit. However, such adaptation can be seen as a positive strength and marker of a high level of resilience. Whether the experiences of homeless people can be used as a potential asset is an area that the research will investigate and contribute towards (Emery, Fay & Flora 2006).

1.8   *Rationale for the Research Study*

A call for reviewing conceptions, policies and working practices with homeless people can be viewed in contemporary homelessness literature (Rowe, 1999; Seal, 2005, 2007; Seager, 2011), in light of post-modern ideas of power, agency, identity and well-being. ABCD is grounded in the theory that emancipatory change is conducted by individuals and communities working cooperatively to achieve mutually defined desired goals or outcomes (Block, 2008).

HtH, in common with similar organisations, struggles to finance and deliver the services it provides. ABCD and service user led initiatives are being implemented to explore alternative approaches to service delivery. However, ABCD has arguably been elevated as a theory that can provide the solution to a wealth of social issues, from addiction through to increasing health outcomes and building stronger communities. At a time when statutory and voluntary public and welfare services are facing increasing cuts it may become tempting to view ABCD as the solution to bridging gaps in service provision via shifting the 'burden' onto the community (Popple, 2000). This research will take a critical view of the possibilities and deficits, negative and positive outcomes within ABCD based working, using an asset-based project sited within HtH as

a focus around which participatory observations and interviews were undertaken (see Chapter 4 for detail regarding methods). It will provide evidence relating to the efficacy of ABCD and assist HtH with developing methods of working and service delivery, whether based around ABCD or other models of service user involvement.

1.8.1 Help the Homeless and an Asset-Based Project

Collecting and distributing food to homeless people has long been one of the primary functions of HtH. The food is donated by local churches, businesses and members of the community, sorted at HtH and packed into parcels by a team of volunteers to distribute to homeless people in need. Prior to 2013, all of the work in collecting, sorting and packaging the food was undertaken by volunteers. However, as part of the move toward exploring asset-based ways of working and methods for creating opportunities for homeless people to become more active within the organisation, some homeless people who use the services of HtH were offered the opportunity to be involved in the food project. The potential roles for homeless people included the sorting and packing of food, and also becoming involved in undertaking general office duties such as cleaning and filing. In addition to the new opportunities to assist in the food bank, a supper club providing free hot meals to homeless people and other members of the local community was established through collaboration between HtH and the United Reform Church (URC). HtH expressed its desire for homeless people to be given the opportunity to become actively involved in the running of both these projects. The food bank and supper club constituted the key areas of investigation and during the research I spent a considerable period of time undertaking participatory observations and interviews at these sites.

1.9 Personal Reasons for Doing the Research

During the course of this research I have often been asked, and to be honest have also asked myself, why are you doing *this*? By *this* I presume many of the enquirers meant working/researching with homeless people. Having lived this research over a number of years I feel able to comment that the question being asked is usually founded upon one of two basic presumptions: either homeless people are needy victims and I, in my role as a 'homeless worker', am considered as a virtuous citizen undertaking a selfless

calling; or the alternative scenario of why do you bother researching/working with *these* people – and for *these* people read feckless, dirty, criminal and any other negative descriptor or stereotype applied to homeless people. The truth is that the description 'homeless person' is simply a label; in reality they are people who just don't happen to have a home, and they are as complex and diverse as everyone else.

It is my belief that all research is in some way linked to an assumption that researchers have the right and the skills to gather data, generate evidence and deliver explanations for what others may be saying or doing (McNiff, 2013). In truth I believe that research can never truly avoid this predicament but it can recognise the nature of the issue and attempt to design and undertake research in a more open and inclusive way. I believe the researcher should be as open about their own thoughts, feelings and experiences as possible and that it is at the very least disingenuous to undertake a study and report upon other people without studying and reporting upon oneself and one's role within the process. It is not my intention to set out to change others through this research in as much as I hope the research changes me and allows others the possibility to share in the process. I strongly believe that the culture into which we are born and raised impacts upon how we view the world and interact with others.

Bourdieu (2000) defined this as 'habitus' and argued that it was this notion of habitus that defines how we act, often instinctively, in given situations. For Bourdieu, the linear and progressive nature of a person's biography should be treated with a measure of caution. It is not that he suggests that a person's biography is fictional; on the contrary it is shaped from an instinctive knowledge that simply feels that 'this is how things unfolded'. However, Bourdieu challenges the notion that a person's biography is a linear set of events driven by individual intention. Instead he theorises that as we age, both in a chronological and 'social sense', our habits, tastes and cultures alter to mirror our social and economic conditions throughout our life. Hence, when looking back at one's own life from a particular standpoint one will instinctively do so through the lens of one's current social and economic position, or from a certain standpoint of habitus. I will provide examples from my own biographical journey and caution the reader that these recollections will be configured to some extent by my current position as a middle-aged married father of two, inhabiting a relatively low economic position, and who feels pulled between a working-class background and a

sense of dislocation due to my perceived 'academic status'. I feel that my own cultural experiences have guided me towards thinking and feeling in certain ways and thus it is important that I begin by examining my own historical, social and cultural positions in an effort to understand how they may have influenced the research.

My own epiphany which brought me closer to an understanding of the centrality of habitus in interpreting my biographical self came while studying at university. I developed an interest in the ideas of Paulo Freire and felt that his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2007) encapsulated my political and world view. However, it was only on reading a critique of Freire from a feminist theorist, whose work I hold a great respect for, that I realised that I read this book without paying attention to the gendered nature of the writing (hooks, 1993). Freire himself later wrote that he was mistaken and that the book was a product of the time, culture and social conditions that he inhabited, his sense of habitus. His later works rejected writing in a gendered manner and incorporated feminist critiques. From this experience I developed an understanding that my predominantly male-centred working-class upbringing had imprinted a certain set of norms and cultural ideas that, without my access to studies, may well have remained as 'common wisdom'. It is my intention to remain vigilant for these issues and write in a manner that is inclusive. However, I understand that to fully erase one's cultural development would be both of negative value and difficult, if not impossible to achieve and I am thus open to criticism for any use of language that may hold vestiges of my cultural heritage.

The concept of habitus will be central to the research in that I see myself as a living part of the research process and not, as is sometimes assumed, as simply an external witness and reporter of cultural and social situations. In many ways I see the process of self-research as the most congruent method to undertake any form of participatory investigation. I feel it is important to bring in the idea of giving a voice to people who often remain unheard at this point. For me, giving voice means providing others with the environment and resources to feel able to articulate the things they wish to say, and to be heard and respected whatever their views, thoughts and feelings may be (Holland & Blackburn, 1998). I believe that it is only through listening to people, without restrictions or reservations that any meaningful form of dialogue, and an exchange of views, can occur. The act of genuinely listening, hearing and sharing

experiences with another person is a powerful act of communion through which possibilities for growth and change may emerge (Freire, 2007). Ian, a formerly homeless man who I worked with, insisted that I tell our story as an example of the possibility we all have for positive change.

I was working at HtH and filling in some paperwork when a volunteer rushed in and asked me to come quickly and assist. I rushed downstairs to the office space and was confronted by a large, tattooed homeless man in a very great state of distress. He had just had an interview around his homeless status and was in a state of rage at being told it was his own fault for moving up to the area and he should return home. Clearly the volunteers were feeling threatened by his size, appearance and distress and the situation needed to be resolved. I approached him and calmly asked him his name and whether he would consider coming to have a drink and a talk with me. He responded that his name was Ian and that yes, he would like to talk. I must admit to feeling a slight sense of threat at being alone with Ian as he was twice my size and had clearly been very angry. However, the way he had been treated appalled me and went against all the things I believe that HtH should stand for.

After five minutes alone Ian relaxed and proceeded to tell me the story of his homelessness. He had owned his own security business in Birmingham and was used to living a good life. He had a good family and was clearly a very intelligent and articulate man. It was at this point that I caught myself at my own, and the other volunteers', misrepresentation of Ian based on our first impressions of him. Ian had lost his business but had found another job and a place to live in the area. He had put all his possessions in storage and come up in his car with a few belongings and his dog. Unfortunately, the job and house fell through and he had been living in his car for a number of weeks. Ian explained that he felt a deep sense of shame and that his pride had stopped him from seeking help. He had struggled with this for weeks and then eventually found the willpower to come through the door at HtH and ask for help. I remember this hitting me like a blow to the stomach: here was a person who had done everything they could to help themselves and despite the sense of shame had found the courage to reach out for help, and our response as an organisation shamed me.

Ian had many personal issues that he wanted to disclose and had no-one else in the area to talk to. I decided there and then to reach out to Ian as a friend and asked him

whether we could work together to try and resolve his issues and my own issues with HtH. We talked together for around three hours and I made sure Ian had access to the resources we could provide him with. I needed to demonstrate my trust in him so asked him to choose and take the food that he felt he needed from the stock cupboard. Ian thanked me and said that I didn't understand just what this meant to him, not simply that I had trusted him, but because he had special dietary needs and through this act he felt that he hadn't been forced to disclose this in a way that would make him seem ungrateful.

I met with Ian regularly over a period of months while he was homeless and monitored and pushed his case for housing at every opportunity. We built a strong friendship and Ian related to me that he wished to use his experience of homelessness as a force for positive change. He started to volunteer at HtH and became a major asset. After a period of being homeless for nearly eight months Ian was finally found a place to live in the local area. Ian wanted to get away from what he described as 'the old life in security' and wished to retrain to work within the social care sector. We discussed options and I contacted a local college I had attended to look at possible courses. The leader of a community and social care course explained that she would be indebted to have someone with Ian's life experience on the course and he signed up.

Fate has a strange way of providing opportunities and it transpired that the same college required an additional team member for the community and social care course. I went along and became a member of the course team as part of my PhD professional development experience. During the course I was privileged to be able to work collaboratively with Ian and a small class, and put into practice my beliefs in challenging the banking method of education through Freirean pedagogy. I remain a teacher on this course and Ian will graduate from the University of Central Lancashire in 2016 with a First Class BA Hons degree. He continues to volunteer with HtH and now runs a local scout troop. Ian assisted in managing an athletic event that we developed as part of our commitment to ensuring research makes a real difference to people and communities. For me, collaborating with Ian as a friend and equal has been life affirming and demonstrates the power of developing relationships based upon trust and common humanity to stimulate mutual understanding and growth.

Although Ian's story is one of hope and positivity, not all homeless people I work with are at the stage of wanting or even accepting the possibility for positive growth that I believe exists in all of us. However, my friendship and work with Ian has taught me the value of always remaining open and willing to meet people at the place that they are at in life. This is not to say that I hold the position that all behaviours, language and perspectives, be they racist or chauvinistic, deserve equal respect or merit. On the contrary, I confess to struggling with sometimes listening to views expressed that I find disturbing or morally indefensible. However, I concur with the work of ethnographers such as Sheftel and Zembrzcki (2013) that whether I agree with or like some of the things a person may express they are held as 'true' to this person and will be, in part, shaped by their cultural and social experiences. It was only through stepping back from my preconceptions and meeting Ian as an equal that the possibility for our friendship, mutual respect and collaborative growth flourished.

But still I haven't answered the question, why am I doing this? To answer this question I must go back and provide a short history of how I became involved in working with homeless people.

I was born, raised and worked in Chorley for forty years. During this time the town became as familiar to me as a friend with whom one shares a love/hate relationship. Familiarity, to draw from a cliché, did breed a level of contempt, but also a feeling of belonging and a desire to be engaged in creating positive change. Living in a relatively small town for a length of time means that one becomes accustomed to the problems and issues facing local people, and although certainly not a deprived area Chorley does have 'pockets' of deprivation that often go unnoticed.

After leaving secondary school and embarking upon work in unsatisfactory and low paid jobs I decided to become self-employed and try to make my own opportunities. Eventually, I owned my own business, a store retailing computers and software. This was when I first encountered homelessness first hand. The store had a basement access and many mornings I would find evidence that someone had slept in the doorway the night before. On making enquiries some of the neighbouring businesses reported that they had seen people sleeping in skips in the delivery yard and other areas. The fact that people were sleeping in such conditions concerned me and I

wanted to do something to address this. I volunteered to work in the local homeless charity as a homeless advisor with a view to 'making a difference'.

Fifteen years later I am still working to try and make a difference although hopefully more strategically and less naively than when I began. I say these things as when I started to volunteer at HtH I expected the people working/volunteering in the organisation to be highly motivated and compassionately disposed towards homeless people; the reality was rather more complex.

On a wet morning sometime in autumn 2006, I arrived at HtH to start my volunteering shift at around 8:45am after braving a torrential downpour. On entering the dimly lit corridor I literally bumped into a very wet, long-term street homeless man whom I knew well through my volunteering. He was clearly very upset and agitated and looked about to either cry or burst into a rage. I will call this man C and simply state that I had known him for around six months and during that time had developed a relationship whereby he felt able to talk to me about his mental health issues and battles with alcohol addiction. C could quite often appear worse for wear due to the effects of drinking, and his language and demeanour could be seen as threatening to those unaware of his personality. On this particular occasion it was clear that the interaction between C and the receptionist had been far from positive. To my recollection the brief exchange that followed went like this:

> C: "*Who the fuck does he think he is, talking to me like that... fuckin' ignorant git!*"

> Alistair: "*Err, morning C, I can see we have some problem here. Do you want to come and talk to me about it?*"

I had barely got the words out when the receptionist shouted through the glass hatch that separated them from us:

> Receptionist: "*No way, he is banned... He is not coming in here high as a kite kicking off like that.*"

C lurched towards the glass hatch and shouted a range of colourful expletives at the receptionist.

> Receptionist: *"Right, get him out now or I call the police, he knows the rules we don't tolerate that kind of abuse."*

> C: *"Fuck you all then, Help the Homeless yeah right. I only wanted to use the fucking phone!"*

With that exchange C stormed out into the rain and, to my knowledge, did not return again. When things had calmed down I asked the receptionist what had happened to make things reach that point.

> Receptionist: *"He came in and wanted his mail this morning and I was busy and said he had to wait. When he opened his mail it was some bad news from the benefit agency and he wanted to use the phone to call them. I don't think we should be letting them tie the phone up and they never offer to pay for the calls, so I said no. He went mental after that so I told him he is now barred from coming in."*

This is an extreme example of how some of the interactions between homeless people and those working in supporting roles are sometimes shaped; unfortunately from my experience they do occur far more than is necessary. While I freely admit that C and others who use HtH can present a challenge to engage with, and that staff working to assist people should not face abusive behaviour, I remain uneasy with the communication methods which many people working with homeless people use. I imagined C, having spent the night sleeping out in the rain, coming to collect his mail and, on being faced with one more obstruction, snapping out a response in frustration at his own feelings of impotence. I recall being deeply offended at the time by the receptionists referring to C as one of *them*, somehow a different and inferior person to *us*, whoever *we* may be. I felt at the time that something should be done to change the way we at HtH work with homeless people and that feeling has remained with me to this day. Listening is a simple word and yet I would argue that it is something that all of us need to learn the true value of and concentrate on really listening to those who have their voices silenced (Ledwith, 1997, p.71-72).

Why have I done this research? In part, the answer is to try finding a better way of working *with* people like C and Ian, and to bring in such voices, rather than keeping them out in the cold. A further motivating factor is my personal unease that the help

we provide through HtH, while vital for homeless people, may represent a form of amelioration. Helping a homeless person survive another day, or even finding them accommodation does nothing to challenge the larger issues of social injustice upon which I feel homelessness is primarily founded. Perhaps the greatest testament this research could bring would be for this message to be heard more clearly and pre/misconceptions around homeless people to be challenged.

During the course of this research people have shared their personal thoughts and feelings about the nature of belonging to a community and often details of their personal biographies. As a researcher I feel it is my duty to begin by sharing some of my own biographical details and my experiences and thoughts on the nature of community; through this process I have explored my own experiences and developed a greater understanding of the perceptions that I will be bringing to the research.

1.10   Community: Personal Perspective

Thinking about community the following words resonate: family, home and relationships. My emotional response is one of feeling a sense of belonging and security, a sense of having roots and a historical narrative and coherence. But where do these thoughts and feelings stem from? Community for me can be mapped and understood through my interactions and understanding of a biographical series of events and relationships.

1.10.1 1970: Born in Chorley in Lancashire to Working-Class Parents

The town of Chorley in the North West of England was my home for almost four decades. During this time I lived in three different houses and was schooled and worked within the town. For me this established community as belonging to a place, Chorley, complete with boundaries and a set of normative ideas and practices. My family and wider circle of relations imparted norms and values, such as belonging to the Church of England, working hard and supporting family and kin. My childhood was one of being part of a large family network and living almost exclusively within the boundaries of a small town environment.

Debates on the meaning and substance of the term 'class' continue to underpin many areas of sociological discussion: whether 'class' is actually a definable 'thing' in itself and how meanings and operations of class have evolved from industrial to post-industrial society. My personal experience of class is that it is a signifier for a range of emotional and physical experiences that are inherited and passed on through generations via family and 'community' (i.e. spatial, territorial) norms and values. Throughout my childhood, being working-class and notions of community were intimately bonded through education, employment and social structures. Living in a working-class community meant accepting bonds of solidarity and difference based upon education and income levels, the accepted norm being that children would attend local comprehensive schools, continue to live in the area and follow their parents into a similar form of work and lifestyle. I now identify the operation of this type of class-system through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony. The ideology of the class system is created at the societal level, through policies that justify inequality and stratification, but is operated through the acceptance and valorisation of categorisations such as working-class by communities and families who continue to impart the norms and values of this system to their children.

1.10.2 1983 -1990: Economic Insecurity

During my later teenage years my father was made unemployed after a long and painful period of strike action against policies being implemented under the Conservative government of the time. For me this period demonstrated the strength and weakness inherent within the ideal of community. The strike action brought many people together, and as a teenager interested me in all things political. I gained an education through accompanying my father to meetings and pickets. However, as the period of strike actions and job closures wore on it became evident that people were having to make difficult decisions whether to put their own and their families' economic survival before that of their work colleagues. 'Communal' ties between workers became stretched and bonds previously thought strong loosened as people struggled to earn a living and some moved away to other areas to seek work. My father was made unemployed along with many others and the effects upon their psychological and physical well-being were noticeably severe. For many men like my father their initial reaction was one of shame and denial. Not having a job meant not

being a 'man' and being unable to provide for the family whilst my mother worked, and this increasingly led him to isolate himself from others. Any previous sense of community cohesion and solidarity appeared misplaced and incongruent with the new realities. I worked in any jobs that became available to help support my family and became increasingly aware that I would have to make my own opportunities to change the situation. This demonstrated to me that community was dependent upon economic resources as well as human/social capital – community ties and mutual support will not pay the rent or put food upon the table indefinitely. Community is political and can be destroyed by exterior pressures, such as recession, unemployment or infrastructure decay and communal action on its own, while necessary, is often insufficient to resist such events.

1.10.3 1992: Self-Employment

I saved enough money to start my own business selling computers and software in Chorley. Although a positive step forward economically this was difficult in that my father disagreed completely and felt that I had compromised my principles. The intersection between class and community values created a restricted and exclusionary space for change and development outside of proscribed social norms and values. However, the reality of the changing political and social environment meant that such norms and values were now becoming restrictive and counterproductive. My business succeeded and became part of a community of small businesses. I opened up a space for young people who often spent much of their leisure time within the shop and this became an example of an informal community space based upon common interest. From this experience I learned that developing community can transcend class, race, age, gender and even spatial barriers and that commonality of interest and a desire to belong together can constitute a strong form of community.

1.10.4 2002: Education, Empowerment and Community

Although my business was prospering I felt trapped and unfulfilled in what I was doing. I had also increasingly become involved in working with the young people who came into my shop on various forms of informal education. Seeing some of the young people change and benefit from interactions with others and extended opportunities made

me contemplate other possible future careers. I undertook a role volunteering with the local Youth Offending Team and my background knowledge of computer games and the fact that many of the young people I worked with knew me through the shop allowed me to build many positive relationships with some of these troubled young people.

My early experiences of education could be defined as resisting a system I saw as oppressive and domineering. I left school with reasonable grades and due to the issues around unemployment my family were facing I went into work. Now in my 30s I had a desire to return to education and make sense of my experiences and insights in an academic manner. No-one in my family had gone to university before as this was considered 'middle-class' and frankly a waste of money and time that could be productively spent on establishing a 'working' career. I set my sights on gaining a degree so attended a community college, gained A levels and enrolled on a community development related course at the University of Central Lancashire.

University for me constituted a sense of community different from others I had experienced. The commonality of being students and of supporting others to achieve individual and yet communal goals sharpened my analysis of community and how it may be constituted. Education at university empowered me to think in new directions and to apply my thoughts and theory to social situations. As part of my education I continued my volunteering and later was employed at HtH. It was through the synthesis of my own experiences, my education and the social issues facing homeless people that I began to construct my ideas for extending community development initiatives towards the most marginalised members of the community: homeless people.

Now married with a family I no longer live in Chorley but still feel an attachment to it and regard it as a place of 'home' and community. My experience and feelings of community stand in contrast to those expressed by my wife. She was born in the United States to a military family and spent the largest part of her childhood and teenage years in a state of transience, moving from base to base and country to country, without being able to ever establish permanent roots. After her father retired from the military the family settled in Colorado, but my wife found that she felt a feeling of 'displacement' with the culture and environment so moved to England.

Despite our very different upbringings we share a common conception of home and community: it is primarily constructed of people and relationships with place and the physical nature of a house being of secondary concern. I believe my reasons for defining home and community in such terms are linked to my childhood and in feeling a strong sense of kinship and solidarity with the people in the community in which I grew. My wife feels that living a transient lifestyle throughout her formative years instilled a sense that homes, as defined in terms of houses, and communities, defined in terms of place and rootedness, may be temporary states, and as such a sense of permanence or continuity is sought through family and social relationships.

My experience and understanding of community have evolved to theorise community as a complex set of interrelated concepts incorporating the individual, social and the economic; place, space, belonging, identity, inclusion, exclusion and participation are among the facets that comprise my continuing understanding of community. However, my recollections will be influenced through my current social, economic and cultural state of habitus. For example, I can no longer reflect and remember how I 'truly' felt during the times when my father was on strike. Whether I was proud or angry or had a sense of pity are emotions that belonged to another time, space and identity and thus my recollections will be coloured by the weight and complex layers of my social, economic and cultural development.

1.11   Chapter Overviews

This thesis will begin by giving an overview of the research terrain through highlighting theories and key literature around homelessness and ABCD. It will continue through describing the theoretical perspectives and methodology underpinning the research before proceeding to examine the findings and reflect upon their possible meanings and application for assisting homeless people to have a greater voice and measure of control over their services. The following is a brief summary of the overall thesis structure.

Chapters 2 and 3 will explore areas relating to homelessness and ABCD and incorporate a review of the literature around these areas. A literature review (Hart, 2006) was undertaken to develop a deeper understanding of ABCD, within the wider

context of community, participation, action and development. Information was sourced from peer-reviewed journal articles, book publications, grey literature and electronic sources. Databases accessed included: Web of knowledge; SCOPUS; and Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts.

To begin with some key areas, or research parameters, were established as the scope of the research was too wide for the time period and resources available under the conditions of PhD research. A comprehensive search of the term asset-based community development highlighted that the majority of the academic literature/research originated from outside the United Kingdom (Green, 2006; Yeneabat & Butterfield, 2012; Kramer et al, 2012; et. al) and that little research was explicitly linked to homelessness. A further critique is that much of the literature is descriptive, rather than theoretical in nature; while useful in compiling background date on the range and scope of ABCD based projects, such literature tended to be written as project reports by the agency responsible and is arguably overly optimistic and disconnected from macro level issues, such as poverty or homelessness.

A comprehensive literature review of homelessness would require more space than is available and decisions had to be taken on how best to provide the necessary detail for the study in a concise form. This research is primarily concerned with furthering the understanding of ABCD, as a means of working to empower homeless people, and the barriers and challenges that may prevent this strategy from achieving such aims. Thus, the search terms homelessness and asset-based community development were used to refine the review. Books by key authors in the field of ABCD (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McKnight & Block, 2012; Russell, 2009, 2015; et al), and homelessness (Fitzpatrick, 2000; Pleace, 2000; Ravenhill, 2008; et al.) in addition to wide range of sources covering strands of social theory, such as community, power and oppression were included in the review. Grey literature and electronic sources were used sparingly due to the contested nature of their academic validity and, as expressed, the overly positive account of ABCD that is arguably presented through these mediums.

1.11.1 Chapter 2: Homelessness: Definitions and Contexts

This chapter will begin through examining what is meant by the term home. Homelessness cannot be understood unless it is situated within a wider social context;

to be homeless presupposes the loss of something and the meanings, perceptions and feelings attached to the concept of home are an important step in trying to understand the social construction of homelessness. The chapter will continue to discuss the complexities in trying to define homelessness and draw attention to the contested and fluid nature of homelessness discourse. Causes of homelessness and the responses taken by the statutory and voluntary sectors will be discussed. The particular issues facing those labelled as rough sleepers will be examined as well as the proposition that homelessness can constitute a denial of citizenship, through a combination of socially constructed perspectives and social policies linked to social control and exclusion which reduce homeless people to the status of clients rather than active citizens.

1.11.2 Chapter 3: What is Asset-Based Community Development?

Chapter 3 explores what have become known as strength and needs based approaches to designing and delivering services. It examines the historical and theoretical development of asset-based community development and continues on to look at how the individual components of assets, community and development are theorised within ABCD. Social capital theory is a fundamental part of ABCD and the development of social capital theory and how it has been incorporated within ABCD are explored. How social capital theory can be understood in the context of homelessness is examined. The chapter develops through describing how ABCD is undertaken in practice and highlights a case study arguing that many projects such as *The Big Issue* magazine, whilst not established or overtly labelled as ABCD, incorporate many of its features. It draws into question the efficacy of such initiatives and concludes by offering a critique of ABCD as a coherent theory.

1.11.3 Chapter 4: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodology

My epistemological and ontological standpoints will be discussed alongside the theoretical perspective underpinning my research. I will provide examples of the theories that have influenced me and that I have drawn upon within the research. The methods of data collection and analysis used will be discussed in conjunction with the methodology and methods used. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the issues and problems I encountered in selecting and using the choice of methods and some of the psychological struggles I faced regarding my identity as a researcher/practitioner.

1.11.4 Chapter 5: Participatory Observations

The research entailed an in-depth period of participatory observation with homeless people and volunteers at HtH. A description of the environment and working practices at HtH is followed by an analysis of some of the key issues that emerged during the observations. A reflection of my experiences and struggles with a sense of conflicting roles and responsibilities is discussed.

1.11.5 Chapter 6: Asset-Based Community Development: Experiences and Thoughts from the Perspectives of Homeless People, Volunteers and Staff at Help the Homeless

The findings from my extensive period of observations and interviews are disseminated and discussed within this chapter. It will draw primarily upon the interview data but will incorporate observational data to highlight and corroborate the themes under discussion. The themes and findings are interwoven with the discussion to present them in the closest way possible to the format of an ongoing process of dialogue and discussion that underpinned the research process.

1.11.6 Chapter 7: ABCD: The Complexity of Perspectives

The views of homeless people, volunteers and staff will be critically discussed in light of what ABCD means to them and how it has impacted, both positively and negatively, on the organisation as a whole and the individuals involved. Recommendations for possible changes in working practices at HtH and the implications for homeless people of incorporating ABCD are discussed. A critique of this research, its strengths and weaknesses and how future research may be developed is explored. The possible impacts of ABCD on homelessness policy and practice are discussed and possible future developments for HtH and the homeless people involved are explored. My thoughts, feelings and reflections upon the research as a process and a journey are documented. My personal analysis of the ABCD project and an evaluation of what I consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of using ABCD within HtH are discussed, concluding with what impact this research has had upon me, both as a researcher and practitioner.

CHAPTER 2: HOMELESSNESS: DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXTS

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control' (United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25, par. 1, 1948).

Despite the noble aims stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, many people across the globe suffer from the effects of poverty, war, disease and a lack of the basic necessities that the world's most fortunate take for granted. Statistics on homelessness are notoriously difficult to define and calculate; however, the United Nations estimates one hundred million people live in unsatisfactory and often unhealthy or dangerous conditions, and a further one hundred million globally exist with no shelter whatsoever (Capdevila, 2005).

Today people from war-torn nations, such as Syria, seek safety and refuge in countries throughout the world, often facing prejudice and fear from sections of the populace among the world's most fortunate in economically developed nations and the risk of tragedy in their efforts to reach possible sanctuary. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that there are over four million registered Syrian refugees. The majority of these refugees are registered in neighbouring countries, such as Egypt, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Between April 2011 and October 2015, 681,713 Syrians applied for asylum in Europe (UNHCR, 2015).

The concept of homelessness varies between time, place and cultures but to be without a home in whatever context this may be understood has a universal human resonance. 'Home' evokes feelings and emotions that reach into the depths of what it means to be human, including positive notions of belonging, returning and acceptance. However, it may also stir emotions linked to experiences of exclusion, rejection and rootlessness. Home is a recurring topic for musicians, authors, artists and one we continually encounter, consciously and subconsciously via our social interactions and through the media channels:

"Feel like going home

Lord I feel like going home

I tried and I failed and I'm tired and weary

Everything I ever done was wrong

And I feel like going home"

(Charlie Rich, "Feel Like Going Home", 1975)

The lyrics by Charlie Rich portray home as a sanctuary and encompass notions of redemption and return to a better place and time. 'Home' is often linked to individual and family experiences of warmth and security and these may be perceived as the normal state of affairs, but for some the reality may be one of insecurity or rejection. This chapter will begin by seeking to define how the concepts of home and homelessness may be understood and interpreted.

As a researcher and worker in the homelessness field, I recognise that definitions of homelessness are linked to ideologies and preconceptions that are held around the concept of home:

> '*Homelessness has often been contrasted with home to highlight the multivariate and devastating nature of the homeless experience...this has resulted in homelessness being discussed as the antithesis or absence of home*' (Moore, 2007, p.144).

Therefore, these ideologies and preconceptions will be discussed as factors inherently related to the issue of homelessness. The concepts and duality of home/homelessness will be explored and the prevalence and causes of homelessness will be investigated with new approaches suggested that may present the possibility of understanding the complexities involved for those experiencing homelessness. It will argue that homelessness is an experience that is unique to the homeless person and that a biographical understanding of the individual should be sought to reduce deterministic conceptions of homelessness. It will seek to challenge the experience of homelessness as constituting citizenship deferred (Merteens & Zambrano, 2010). The chapter will conclude through arguing that homelessness is often constructed and utilised in a manner that creates stigma and exclusion for homeless people, and that the

psychological nature of the homeless experience should be given equal consideration to the physical aspects.

2.1   What is Home?

'*Home: The place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household*' (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2007, p. 1266).

As I type this I notice the home tab at the top of my screen and think about how this relates to returning or going back to a place well known. For me, home is intrinsically associated with family and spending time with my parents and extended family. For home to exert this emotional response and meaning it must be experienced through dialectic of being at home and away from home: an appreciation that I have the freedom to leave, but the security of return to a familiar and comforting environment. It has been argued that '*home is essentially a subjective phenomenon*' (Fox, 2002, p.581). The word 'home' often brings to mind images of safety, security and belonging. However, this is only one interpretation of the word and concept of home and, to someone living in a violent or abusive relationship, home may relate to negative thoughts of fear or confinement (Chapman & Hockey, 1999). Research by Tomas & Dittmar (1995) describes the meaning of home for women who have experienced homelessness through domestic abuse:

'*There was no house, no set of streets, or even town, to which the women felt they could return and at least be recognised, even if they wanted to. The "situation" of home in these accounts was changeable and unstable*' (Tomas & Dittmar, 1995, 506).

The majority of people in Britain may be aware of the saying "an Englishman's [sic] home is his castle" and think this phrase simply states a positive principle of home as a private space free from unwarranted outside intrusion. However, the belief of home as a private space beyond the reach of the state may be overstated. The enactment of the Domestic Crime and Violence Victims Bill (2004) made it the legal right of bailiffs to force entry into private property in connection to unpaid fines for criminal offences

(The National Archives, nd). Furthermore, as the research by Tomas and Dittmar (1995) suggests using such terminology discriminates against women, and may be construed as giving the male head of the household 'rights' to practice dominance within a domestic environment (Wardhaugh, 1999). However, phrases such as "an Englishman's home..." still resonate with many people and are felt to contain 'common wisdom'. The influence of such inherited cultural 'knowledge' upon our perceptions demonstrates the problematic nature of trying to define home as a universally discrete, positive and empowering domain.

To discuss home is to discuss a socially and culturally constructed ideal; this is not to argue that home does not exist or that it is an illusion, but to highlight that it is a construct linked to a collection of norms, values and beliefs within a historical period (Somerville, 1992; Veness, 1993; Hutson and Liddiard, 1994; Clapham, 2012a). Gurney (1990) defines home as an ideological construct which is founded upon lived experience; however this view is contentious as it suggests the possibility that even the homeless have a home, albeit one formed of an experience of 'home' as an internal state and lived out in public spaces.

Home is often defined through Western-centric ideologies linked to domestic and socialisation functions. However, perhaps the definition should be broadened to investigate different cultural notions of home (Mallet, 2004). Culture, land and customs may be equally important as a type or permanence of dwelling (Wilson, 2008). It is arguable that a Native American member of the Great Plains Nations in the early 19th Century would have seen home as belonging to a tribe and living within a highly mobile camp structure: that *'home is a network of connections that do not rest in one place itself'* (Robinson, 2002, p.9).

Those who work with homeless people face the contentious issue that homeless people may report feeling 'at home' on the streets. The sense of belonging with other homeless people and a feeling of familiarity with the environment may become a congruent reality for some homeless people. However, as homeless workers there is a constant tension with seeking to 'assist' people to move from the streets and resisting the dilemma of reducing the agency of homeless people through denying them this choice by subscribing to beliefs that they are either motivated through a sense of false

consciousness or driven by a lack of positive life choices and options. Considering home purely from a culturally constructed perspective, defining different conceptions as inferior, would demonstrate a disregard for cultural difference. Indeed the concept of home has become synonymous with Western values and competing notions, such as home being linked to a belonging to the earth and thus not a commodity, were removed through a process of hostile colonialism. Perhaps for people sharing the commonality of an experience of oppression, such as homeless people, understanding the context of those dispossessed of their 'homes' through structural and economic processes has much to contribute to an evolving concept of home:

> *'Home: the weaved and layered fabric of land, people, place, space, language, stories, culture, memory is an ongoing conversation without an end'* (Wilson, 2008, p.9).

What constitutes an 'ideal' home, in such areas as construction, aesthetics and functionality, differs from period to period and between cultures and societies. Social policy decisions, such as planning and house building regulations, impact upon what is considered an acceptable home for varying groups of people within a society. The rows of terraced houses in some of Lancashire's ex-mill towns, which once may have been occupied by the more affluent members of the working class and considered desirable, are now often defined as 'cheap' rental or social housing or in some cases are left derelict. It may be argued that such housing is no longer fit for aspirational 'working people' to inhabit, or perhaps it is the case that, for a growing number of people, a semi-detached house with a garage is considered as the basic standard of a home. Commenting on the growing problem of empty properties in East Lancashire, Burnley MP Gordon Birtwistle expressed his opinion that: "*People want to live in nice, new houses with a front garden and central heating, not 120-year-old terraced houses that have damp*" (Lancashire Telegraph, 2014, np). Despite the debate around the standard and suitability of housing stock, the point remains that in form and definition the nature of home is open to change and interpretation.

The power to designate and categorise the status and meaning of home is often overlooked by authors and researchers writing around home and homelessness (Moore, 2007). Thousands of houses remain empty throughout the UK due to being

designated as 'unfit' by those in positions of authority. The question may be asked: would people who are excluded from owning or having access to a home consider such policies rational and socially equitable? Indeed, access to such housing stock is denied on the grounds of it being 'unfit for habitation' yet people are housed in hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation that is also often considered unacceptable. Perhaps a class-dominated social construction of what constitutes a home has led to a decrease in housing opportunity and exclusion for those at the margins of society (Patton, 2014).

The idea of a place to live and call one's own feels at odds with the way that many people live in the present age of the 'global' economy: flexibility and a willingness to move with the availability of employment opportunities sits uneasily with the ideal of a 'settled' home and being rooted in a community. In the Western post-modern age the idea of permanence feels ever more incongruent with the often transitory and liquid way that place and space has become defined (Bauman, 2000). Personal biographies and histories may often be punctuated by periods of migration and movement, through employment, relationships and housing related factors. Indeed it could be argued that refusal to adapt to an ever evolving pattern of social mobility and travel is actively discouraged; from the exhortations of Norman Tebbit to '*get on your bike and find work*' (Rao, 2011) to the modern ideal of the commute to work, employment is to be reified and home and family seen as secondary to the structure of work.

Home, or more specifically 'housing', is an overtly political issue in terms of quantity, types of tenure and allocation: who is 'entitled' to housing and under what terms and conditions? It can be argued that ideologies around home and housing are at the centre of both global macro-politics: a currently oft-repeated tabloid mantra being '*where will the Syrian refugees be housed and at whose cost?*' In local or micro-politics, terms of community relations are often characterised by resistance to building centres offering accommodation for people considered 'deviant' or 'outsiders', running through to offering homeless people access to services. Inherent throughout these examples runs the language of fear and distrust of the 'other' and the contemporary capitalist ideology of the individual existing in a state of competition and individualism.

During a PhD supervision meeting we discussed the complexity of the term home and how our childhood experiences and opportunities, linked to class and economic security, can colour our perceptions. I defined my own experiences of home as positive, and yet I have worked most of my adult life with people who have lost and suffered through issues relating to either an unhappy, unstable or lack of a home. I believe that through encountering these opposing, yet genuine, experiences of home my understanding of the social construction of home and homelessness has been given a deeper focus (Berger & Luckmann, 1972). My supervisor shared the experience of living in a state of transience through often travelling to conferences and living in hotels. However, we concurred that although we could discuss and define our experiences of 'home', we were privileged in that we had relational and economic supports and have personally never experienced 'genuine' homelessness. Home, for us, was something to come back to, to share with family and shape and make one's own space and refuge. However, for some people, flexibility and the mobility and opportunity to move is limited. The resources, both economic and social, necessary to function and succeed in an increasingly mobile environment may be exclusionary for those who have limited access to economic and social capital (Castells, 1996; Bauman, 2001). Living in hotels while undertaking work may generate emotional dissonance but it does not replicate the daily reality of having no place that one can call home or return to. For many people homelessness or housing insecurity is not a choice that can be mitigated through returning to a place of belonging or to people who care.

Perhaps home, in common with the related notion of community, has become an ideal drawing from ideas of a past age, one of communal ties and solidarity, rooted tangibly into the idea of society (Veness, 1993). Such ideas of home reify the belonging to family, or household, and links home to notions of solidarity and social ties. In the UK, as is common with many other countries, there appears an increasing trend for people to live alone. In 2013, 29% of the 26.4 million homes in the UK were classed as solo occupied (ONS, 2013). Perhaps this marks a changing attitude to the ideals of home and family as inclusive and is linked towards home being felt more in consumerist terms, home as a symbol of status or economic worth: '*home became a consumer item, a measure of our success*...' (Frawley, 1990, p.7). Conversely, home may be viewed in terms of more basic functionalist notions of a roof over one's head, as a

place that one uses to rest, eat and sleep rather than a place of family or belonging: '*there is no time to invest in relationships. Home is a practical matter*' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.11). However, home may also be defined as a place of comfort and relaxation or as an expression of identity, a place to be oneself. It may also be perceived as a place of safety and a haven from the outside world. Home appears to be constituted through notions of a realm of private space, home as a place to shut oneself away from society. Such conceptions may constitute a retreat away from close community ties and obligations. These contrasting views of the changing nature and relationship of home and family could be viewed negatively as a sign of increasing community breakdown, or, more positively, as a marker of rising standards of living and an increase in personal freedom and individuality.

The complexity and fluidity inherent within the ideas and realities of home present a challenge to definitions of homelessness. There is not one homogenous group of people who constitute 'the homeless', but a diversity of people who are without a home for a wide and complex number of reasons (Hagen, 1987):

> '*At times, for a group of individuals and families home means not a "place" but a "process", of gaining information and experiences, finding temporary oases of safety and support, redesigning themselves and their understanding of how to live a productive life. Among those in this last group are men women and children who struggle with homelessness*' (Cancro, 2013, ix).

Cancro succinctly encapsulates the complexity, struggle and psycho-social nature of homelessness. I concur with the notion that homelessness is a descriptor of a condition and not of a human characteristic (Blasi, 1990, p.209). Possibly a broader notion of housing insecurity, encompassing not just those without a literal roof but people living in unsuitable, temporary or dangerous, in both the physical and emotional sense, conditions, rather than homelessness, may more aptly describe the position of many people facing such issues today.

The following section will discuss the changing nature of the definitions of homelessness.

2.2   *Defining Homelessness and the Complexity of Perceptions*

Any definition of homelessness is open to challenge as representing a subjective view. Defining homelessness historically and contemporarily remains an area of contested terrain (Neale, 1997; Seal, 2007; Cronley, 2010; Somerville, 2013). Orthodox wisdom describes homelessness as either being attributed to personal failings, such as poor financial management or substance misuse, or through social factors beyond the control of the individual, such as unemployment or a lack of housing. These explanations comprise the two poles of the individualist/structuralist debate (Neale, 1997; Clapham, 2012b). A brief history of the evolving debate around defining homelessness, from a UK perspective follows, leading to a discussion of contemporary critiques seeking to synthesise and move beyond the binary individual/structuralist definitions.

Pre-industrial English society held a fear of the wandering poor and destitute. These fears led to the development of often discriminatory notions of the deserving and the intentional, or criminally poor (Fraser, 1992). The welfare system of the early Elizabethan Poor Laws initiated an ideology of the pathology of the poor. The poor were to be understood to be in some way responsible for their misfortune and deemed either in need of a level of assistance, or of having their behaviour corrected through punishment and coercion (Foucault, 1991). Concepts of poverty and homelessness continued to be constructed through the lens of the deserving/undeserving poor, as can be viewed in the policy creation of the Victorian Poor Laws and the workhouses (Bauman, 2001). The creation of the post-war Welfare State arguably influenced an ideological shift through the combination of New Liberalism and Fabian Social Democracy promoting the idea of a system of welfare provision based upon notions of citizenship, and the provision of a minimum level of equality through universal welfare provision (Timmins, 2001). The notion of structural forms of inequality began to challenge individual conceptions (Anderson, 2004). However, the universalist nature of welfare provision delivered through this system has been critiqued through drawing attention to exclusion based upon gender and racial lines:

'The extension of social citizenship rights implied movement towards greater

social equality, but was paradoxical in effect. It stimulated expectations of

distributive justice while concealing the inegalitarian assumptions which justified

the emergent social relations of welfare' (Froggett, 2002, p. 49).

Further evidence of the exclusionary nature of many aspects of welfare reform can be found in the implementation of housing and homelessness legislation. For example the 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act excluded many single homeless people from social housing:

'The 1977 Housing (Homeless Persons) Act, although it was an achievement in

many respects, failed the overwhelming majority of single homeless people

without dependants. By defining entitlement to social housing it enshrined the

concept of "included" and "excluded", "deserving" and "undeserving" homeless.

As a consequence, social housing providers have tended to act as a filter, not a

safety net, for single homeless people' (Foord, Palmer & Simpson, 1998, p.viii).

The debate that the roots of homelessness are grounded in structural or individual causes alternated and influenced the background for policy development. A shift towards integrating individual and structural approaches to defining homelessness, and placing a greater emphasis on a lack of housing and affordability (Dant & Deacon 1989; Fitzpatrick 2000; Fitzpatrick, Kemp & Klinker, 2000) occurred following the screening of Cathy Come Home, a television drama based upon a homeless family in 1966. The establishment of housing charity/pressure group Shelter in the same year assisted in this paradigm shift. Although generally perceived to be a progressive benefit for homeless people the shift towards structural definitions of homelessness has been critiqued as establishing a '*new orthodoxy*' (May, 2000 p. 613).

In common with the earlier definitions this new orthodoxy treated homelessness as a social fact, where clearly one group with power is creating a label ('homelessness') and applying it as a method that may reduce a complex set of relations to a simple issue (a lack of a home) due to some combination of structural and individual problems. The new orthodoxy of understanding homelessness can be argued to have inherited theoretical weaknesses inherent within the sociological debate around the nature and

operation of structure and agency (Giddens, 1979). Fitzpatrick (2005), for example, questions how the factor of a relationship breakdown within a case of homelessness could be classified as either a product of individual or structural causation with any degree of validity. Many people suffer from relationship breakdowns yet only a small minority will experience homelessness, and it is the individual biography and complexity of relations, both personal and social, that will make the experience of homelessness unique to each individual (Clapham, 2003).

Arguably, contemporary neo-liberal political and ideological dominance influenced perceptions and policy regarding homelessness back towards the individualistic/behavioural paradigm. Homelessness, along with mental illness, addiction, teenage pregnancy and other social issues have become ever more medicalised (Lyon-Callo, 2000). The medicalisation of social issues reinforces the ideology of individual responsibility, that issues such as homelessness are products of individual failings or predispositions towards 'conditions' such as mental health problems or addiction. Homelessness becomes not an issue of understanding and challenging social and economic inequalities but of 'curing' the homeless of their individual conditions that make them homeless:

> '*The medicalization of social problems plays the ideological function of legitimizing existing class relations and serves to depoliticize what is intrinsically a political problem. Thus, within a medical framework, what requires a collective answer is presented as an individual problem, demanding an individual response*' (Navarro, 1986, p. 40).

However post-modernist and post-structuralist theories offer an alternative to the duality of structural/individual through undertaking different research approaches (Zufferey and Kerr, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2005; Somerville, 2013). Such approaches critique structural/individual positions as being reductionist, question the validity of these positions and seek to challenge the concept of homelessness as an individual issue or a reductionist meta-narrative.

The idea of homelessness has generated much 'folk knowledge', and a virtually mythical canon of literature exists describing the homeless experience as one of

almost heroic individualism: for example, the American concept of the hobo as resourceful and free to live a nomadic life. At the other extreme homeless people are categorised as desperate and dysfunctional or delinquent and criminal. From Jack London's descriptions of the wretched existence of *The People in the Abyss* (2007) to George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (2013) or Alexander Masters' contemporary book *Stuart: A Life Backwards* (2007), the experience of the homeless holds a literary fascination; however, the reality of being homeless is a far more nuanced experience than the literary archetypes portray. To be homeless is as much a psychological as a physical reality and the 'solutions' to the issues are more complicated than providing shelter or treating some perceived form of deviant behaviour inherent within homeless people (Seal, 2005). Homelessness should be understood within a broader psycho-social context that goes beyond the physical and economic to encompass notions of identity, exclusion and an understanding of the biographical narratives that homeless people may share to benefit both homeless people and those seeking to assist (Clapham, 2010; Christian et al, 2012).

To establish clarity and honesty the author's view is that homelessness should be characterised through an understanding of the individual biography and narrative of a 'homeless person' sited in the wider social context of poverty and inequality (Clapham, 2004). In summary any chosen definition of homelessness will be a matter of interpretation and arguably influenced by an ideological position.

2.3   *Causes of Homelessness*

'*Homelessness is not an end point but a recurring waystation for the very poor*' (Hopper, Susser and Conover, 1985 in Blasi 1990, p.208).

There are two fundamental questions often related to homelessness: these are how and why someone became or is homeless. In my experience of working with homeless people the 'how' is related to people simply not having access to, or the financial resources to pay for, a place to live. The 'why' is more complex. People may have lost a job and fallen behind on their rent payments; in this case homelessness is usually a short term problem that will be resolved by an improvement in the person's financial

situation. However, for many people the reason/s why someone experiences homelessness are far more complicated. At the global level, people may be made homeless by war, poverty or environmental factors, over which they have no control. In countries such as the UK, homelessness is often related to relationship breakdowns, illness or mental health issues, domestic or family abuse, drug or alcohol misuse, gambling addiction or financial illiteracy and other factors. In many cases the why can simply be defined by a run of misfortunes leading to homelessness.

The questions we ask and the answers we seek are not neutral; they are motivated through our concepts and understandings of homelessness and what our objectives may be. If one wishes to measure the scale of homelessness within a given area, then the questions asked and methods used will differ from those employed if one wishes to understand the causes of homelessness (Blasi, 1990; Zufferey & Kerr, 2004). Within a homeless project working with people using strength or asset-based approaches the questions asked and language used become paramount. For example, concentrating on the causes of homelessness may be seen as disempowering in that it may reduce the impact of seeking to appreciate and utilise the strengths and gifts of an individual through concentrating overly on individual problems such as alcohol use or mental health issues. Nevertheless, organisational structures demand that the causes of homelessness for people seeking assistance are investigated and addressed, and this can lead to incongruence and uncertainty for homeless workers and homeless people seeking to use an asset-based approach. A counter argument could be that homeless people should be empowered to view their position in the light of structural forms of inequality and assisted to challenge these forms of oppression. This is not to take a reductionist standpoint that negates the position of agency. It instead seeks to suggest that for many people 'choice' is often constrained, and that through placing an overemphasis on homelessness as an individual problem the intersection between the structural and agency factors can become obscured. These arguments will be discussed in further depth in the following chapters.

Homelessness is a term that carries a wide range of meanings and definitions. It is a highly contested and emotive term that is often ideologically deployed in the wider context of political and socio-economic spheres. As discussed the causes of homelessness are generally argued to fall into either individual or structural

definitions. For example, housing and homelessness charity Shelter defends the idea of a 'deep' and 'inclusive' definition of homelessness that includes many people who clearly have a home to live in or place to stay; structural factors, such as unemployment and a shortage of housing stock are highlighted as the primary drivers of homelessness (Webb, 2014). In comparison, governmental and housing related authorities often prioritise a more tightly defined definition that seeks to exclude rather than include and is premised upon defining need. This definition is arguably more individualistic in operation. Both of these positions are, at least partially, ideologically defined and present evidence as to why their particular definition should hold precedence. Such complexity is not a new phenomenon in housing and the political nature of this concept can be traced back through historic housing and homelessness policy construction and delivery (Lund, 1996; Cowan & Marsh, 2002).

Homelessness may be broadly defined as an individual, or family, feeling that their current housing is insufficient for their needs or, in contrast, as applying to someone who literally has no access to a place to live or reasonable shelter. In the UK definitions of homelessness go beyond applying to people who are 'sleeping rough'. Many people are rarely 'homeless' in the literal sense of not having a roof over their heads, but are either threatened with the loss of or inability to continue to remain in their current accommodation, for a number of diverse and often complex reasons. Somerville (2013) argues that homelessness is multi-dimensional and that theories focussing upon the individual or structural causes are limiting:

> '*It is important to recognize this multidimensional character, not least because homelessness cannot be remedied simply through the provision of bricks and mortar – all the other dimensions must be addressed, such as creature comforts, satisfying relationships, space of one's own, ontological security and sense of worth*' (Somerville, 2013, p. 384).

This multidimensional character is problematic for statutory housing agencies to incorporate into their service delivery as they are tasked to meet a specific remit: i.e. allocate a finite physical resource (housing) toward people specified as 'entitled', within a defined geographical area. Psychosocial concerns, such as ontological security and sense of worth may be beyond the scope of housing authorities' remit and

resources, and as such will usually remain unaddressed (Froggett, 2002). Perhaps locally based third sector and charity organisations may be better placed in integrating the emotional and psychological aspects of homelessness, through being positioned to have the opportunity to build more in depth community and personal relationships. However, such organisations are arguably becoming more dependent upon accessing funding through the processes of commissioning and tendering. Becoming dependent upon such sources of funding runs the risk of compromising their independence and ability to offer services running counter to government proposed initiatives. The counter argument runs that a greater level of professionalism and integration between the third and statutory sectors provides a healthier environment for collaborative working and reduces service duplication. Perhaps such aims could be met without reducing the independence of the third sector; however a greater focus on identifying such issues and greater partnership working could be beneficial in developing an increased awareness of the multidimensional complexity of homelessness. Perhaps the ideal goal is to accept homelessness as existing upon a continuum, resist the urge to generate often exclusionary or disempowering meta-theories of causation, and look towards seeing homelessness as a particular symptom or issue of a wider form of individual and social distress.

2.4   Local Authorities and Homelessness

Local authorities are charged with considering the housing needs of their area, including homeless households. Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide assistance to those households defined as homeless. All households who apply for assistance are entitled to advice under the housing and homelessness Acts. Applicants for assistance are interviewed to establish levels of need. If an application is accepted then a 'main homelessness duty' is established and the applicant is deemed eligible for assistance. An established 'duty' means that the authority must ensure that suitable accommodation is provided for the applicant/s until a more permanent housing solution is provided.

Certain groups are defined as constituting a 'priority need'. These groups are people considered to be vulnerable or at risk. Typically priority need groups include:

- Households with dependent children

- Pregnant women

- People classed as vulnerable through either mental or physical disability

- Those aged 16-17

- Those aged 18-20 who have previously been in care

- People vulnerable through spending time in care, the prison system or the armed forces

- People forced to leave their home through violence or the threat of violence (particularly, though not limited to, domestic violence) (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014)

The concept of priority need remains a contentious issue within UK homelessness legislation. Following devolution, Scotland removed the category of priority need from Scottish homeless legislation:

'The 2003 Homelessness etc. (Scotland) Act made provisions for the distinction between 'priority' and 'non-priority' need to be effectively abolished at the end of 2012. As part of this process, Scottish local authorities have been gradually relaxing or removing their priority need criteria' (Crisis, 2015a).

Homelessness prevention has become a cornerstone of UK legislation since the Homelessness Act 2002. In practice, prevention takes the form of a housing options interview prior to an assessment of homelessness. Housing options looks at alternative solutions to housing issues through undertaking initiatives such as providing mediation, for example in the case of someone leaving home due to relationship issues, increased security for victims of domestic violence, or assistance with a rent bond to secure private rental accommodation. While such initiatives may be valuable to prevent or relieve homelessness, in certain cases they may also be critiqued as assisting housing authorities to reduce homeless statistics and manage demands for more affordable accommodation. Prevention strategies have been linked to reductions in homelessness, particularly among younger people; however, it may not be the

initiation of the prevention measures that accounts for any reduction in numbers, but the tightening of policies relating to housing allocation linked to reductions in housing related benefit entitlements, such as the single room allowance, that reduce the number of homeless applications. Concerns have been voiced that Local Authorities may view prevention strategies primarily in the light of being judged by the number of reductions in statutory homeless applications. Such a perception is theorised to possibly incentivise councils to take on a more 'gatekeeping' approach to reduce the number of statutory homeless people (Pawson, 2009).

The 2011 Localism Act made a significant change to homelessness legislation in England and Wales. Under the provisions of this act local authorities may be considered to have fully discharged their duties through offering a private rental sector tenancy for a period of twelve months. This offer does not depend upon the consent of the client and is a move from the previous position whereby local authorities had a duty to offer a social property, unless the client opted to choose a private rental property (Crisis, 2015b). This change may be viewed in light of two perspectives: to provide people with more housing 'choice' and freedom or as a means to reduce and residualise the social housing section through promoting 'market' mechanisms.

2.5   *Homelessness Statistics*

Homeless statistics and the methods used to compile them are contentious and open to interpretation. Statistical data before the mid-1960s is scarce and attitudes towards homelessness as a social issue remained wedded to the ideas of deserving and undeserving people. Homelessness was perceived as an often 'short-term' welfare issue rather than housing issue (Foord, Palmer & Simpson, 1998):

> '*How many people are homeless is a debate that has been running for thirty years or more*' (Greve & Currie, 1990, p.28).

Homeless statistics in 2014 remain as elusive and contentious, and Greve & Currie's assertion on the debate into number of homeless people could now be argued to have continued to run for over fifty years or more.

Councils in England received 27,310 applications for help with homelessness in figures published for the period between January-March 2014. Of these applications 12,520 were accepted for help, and 58,590 households were in temporary accommodation at the end of this period (DCLG, 2014). Shelter highlights that these figures are, at best, low-estimates as to the number of people facing homelessness, in part due to 'gate-keeping' policies operated by authorities as a means of rationing insufficient housing resources and from the possible number of people classed as 'hidden homeless' (Webb, 2014). The hidden homeless are those who do not approach councils for help with housing problems, for a variety of possible reasons, yet may be technically homeless or facing homelessness. For some, especially the young single homeless who are often considered 'low priority' or 'out of duty', applying to the council for assistance may be considered as futile as they believe no help will be available (Foord, Palmer & Simpson, 1998). Other homeless people report that the stigma attached to the label of homelessness acts as a deterrent to engagement (Rayburn and Guittar, 2013). An annual report by homelessness organisation Crisis, *The Homeless Monitor* 2015, highlights the possibility that official statistics on homelessness may be grossly under representative of the real measure:

> '*This report reveals how official homelessness figures are masking the true scale of the problem. In fact, nearly two thirds of councils think they no longer reflect trends in their area. And the reason? Councils in England have been changing the way they deal with homelessness and have become increasingly reliant on more 'informal' responses that are recorded separately - such as financial assistance and debt advice, assistance to stay in a tenancy or family mediation. The bottom line is that we can no longer rely on these figures to show national trends*' (Fitzpatrick, Bramley & Watts, 2015, p.vi)

In addition to people receiving 'informal' assistance, such as family mediation, not all applicants are considered to be eligible for receiving housing assistance. Applicants considered to have made themselves 'intentionally homeless', perhaps through voluntarily leaving a property which they were legally entitled to inhabit or neglecting to pay rent, are only entitled to an assessment of their housing needs and advice on seeking accommodation. The nature of the term 'intentionally homeless' is often interpreted in a broad context and may be criticised as being a tool to reduce the

number of people who can receive assistance and constrain homelessness statistics. There may be genuine mitigating factors, even amongst those seeking assistance that have not paid their housing costs or have 'voluntarily' left their property. To label someone as intentionally homeless may appear as a return to the policies of the Victorian Poor Laws and notions of people as being determined deserving or undeserving of help, through their own in/action.

In the UK, as a correlation of government reductions to welfare spending instigated under the umbrella of 'austerity' measures, levels of homelessness show a steep increase. Between July and September 2015 a reported 68,560 families and other households were housed in temporary accommodation. The number of people sleeping on the streets has shown an increase through official statistics and stands at 2744 as at the end of December 2015 (Cooper, 2015). As housing costs continue to rise in conjunction with a shortage of homes and a lack of social housing provision, it appears that homeless figures will continue to demonstrate a depressingly upward trend.

2.6   Rough Sleepers

At the extreme end of the spectrum homelessness may be defined as not having a roof over one's head or access to any form of accommodation. Such circumstances are often termed as 'rough sleeping' or 'street homelessness'. The number of people described as 'rough sleepers' at any one point in time is difficult, if not impossible, to assess with any degree of certainty. Official estimates are compiled through undertaking 'rough sleeping' counts whereby the local authority, often assisted by voluntary agencies, will check areas where homeless people are known to sleep to assess the number present at a given date/time. This method is less than exact in that it only takes place on a certain day and between certain times. To be classified as homeless someone must be either bedded down or be preparing to bed down for the night. Safety and security issues ensure that only locations deemed as an acceptable risk may be visited and those responsible for undertaking the count are required to

operate in groups and usually are accompanied by some form of official/authority presence.

> *'Rough Sleepers are defined as follows for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates:*
>
> *People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes" which are makeshift shelters, often comprised of cardboard boxes).*
>
> *The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers. Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding'* (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014).

As in the case for the social construction of the concept of home the above passage highlights the process of socially constructing definitions of homelessness, such as rough sleeping. It is interesting that while sleeping in a tent in an area defined as public space would be considered rough sleeping residing at a campsite would not. People living in hostels, shelters or squats are also not considered to be rough sleepers yet no clarification as to the level of habitation of these places is provided.

2.6.1   Rough Sleeper Estimates: England 2010 -2013

Table 1: Rough sleeping						
	England total		London		Rest of England	
	Number	% change	Number	% change	Number	% change
2010	1,768		415		1,353	
2011	2,181	23%	446	7%	1,735	28%
2012	2,309	6%	557	25%	1,752	1%
2013	2,414	5%	543	-3%	1,871	7%

Graph 1 Rough sleeping counts and estimates by London and Rest of England

DCLG (2014) Rough sleeping statistics: autumn 2013 and autumn 2010.

https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping

Council estimates for rough sleepers undertaken in 2013 and published in February 2014 show 2,414 people may be considered to be sleeping rough at any one particular night. The figure for the North West of England, which covers the area under consideration in this research, estimates 152 people classified as street homeless or sleeping rough, on any particular night (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014).The Crisis homeless monitor report 2015 highlights that rough sleeping is becoming an increasing cause for concern, especially in areas around London and the South East, and questions the validity of official homelessness statistics and the methodology used in collating these statistics:

> '...we explored possible alternative ways of estimating the extent of rough sleeping across the country. Drawing on a combination of administrative and survey datasets, we have developed exploratory estimates of between about 4,000 and 8,000 people sleeping rough in England on a typical night in 2010/11, at a time when official estimates were of less than 2,000' (Fitzpatrick, et al 2015, p. 5-6).

Research I undertook into *The No Second Night Out* initiative for The Foxton Centre, an organisation supporting homeless people in the Preston area, provided evidence suggesting that the incidence of rough sleepers prevalent within areas of North West

England also may be significantly higher than official estimates suggest (Jewell, 2014). Figures provided by The Foxton Centre detail 41 people being identified as new to sleeping rough seeking assistance during the period between April 2013 and March 2014. This figure demonstrates a marked increase on the official rough sleeper estimate provided by Preston Council, which stood at 5 in 2013 (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2014).

Rough sleeper counts are problematic in that homeless people may resist being found for fear of losing their sleeping place, or as a response aimed at rejecting engagement with any authority figures. Dependent upon the time of year or weather conditions people may also remain 'hidden' in an effort to stay warm and dry. Homeless people may not be present at the specific locations chosen at the times the count takes place, or may have short-term access to a hostel or similar sleeping place for a short period of time, yet are still generally street homeless. However, it is this group, defined as 'street homeless' or 'rough sleepers' that are generally considered to be the 'real' homeless by many members of communities and as constituting the most problematic group to assist by local authorities and support organisations. Social attitudes towards these groups range from empathy and a genuine will to assist, to the extreme of seeking to demonise and scapegoat all street homeless as hopeless, feckless, addicts, alcoholics and criminals undeserving of assistance.

2.7   Citizens or Clients: Homelessness as Citizenship Deferred

From the previous sections it should be clear that within the social construction of homelessness there is an ongoing interaction between those considered to have power (housing authorities, charities, the general public) and those with a lack of power (people defined as homeless). The concepts of power and powerlessness are highly contested and complex issues (Gaventa, 1980; Foucault, 1980; Morris, 2002; Lukes, 2005). Power is multifaceted and operates on many levels, in relations between structures, groups and individuals. The complexity and operation of power in the field of homelessness will be discussed in greater detail in proceeding chapters. The

following section will discuss how the nature of homelessness can be seen as disempowering through restricting or denying facets of citizenship to homeless people.

Faulks (2000, p.4) writes that citizenship '*implies a sense of inclusion in the wider community.*' For homeless people the most basic forms of inclusion are often denied: for example, the lack of having an address even to receive mail creates difficulties, both economic and social, that anyone who has never experienced homelessness will find difficult to comprehend. It could be argued that the lack of a place to live is the most basic form of social exclusion one can face. The position and status of the homeless person as a citizen is compromised through the very nature of the construction of and physical, psychological and economic impacts of homelessness. The position of the homeless individual could be summarised as citizenship deferred (Merteens & Zambrano, 2010) until the misfortune of the homeless situation is overcome, allowing the individual to 'reclaim' their position as an active citizen. For those considered long-term or 'chronic' homeless the opportunities for reintegration into active citizenship are remote. I would argue that homelessness may represent a microcosm of the process of advanced neo-liberal policies that have become defined as '*the shock doctrine'* (Klein, 2008). By this I mean that the process of homelessness represents a shock from which the individual may need assistance to recover their sense of coherence and identity. However, in line with neo-liberal ideology, homelessness is often treated as a symptom of personal failure with the prescription being to change the person's life through promoting individual action relating to increasing ones economic prospects through paid labour. Re-establishing and nurturing ideas of identity or community are, at best, secondary considerations. Through this process I would argue that homelessness becomes an increasingly alienating situation that deepens an individual's sense of a damaged identity and a flawed narrative. The idea of homeless narratives and biographies will form a major part of this thesis and will be discussed in further chapters.

Citizenship requires the ability to participate in society and a key aspect of such participation would constitute access to public space. Historically homeless people have experienced discrimination and a denial of their rights to partake fully in society as active citizens. Homeless people acquire a label that carries with it a negative stigma. Goffman (1963, p.3) defines stigma as a '*deeply discrediting'* attribute that can

spoil one's identity and exclude from social norms and interactions. Many people who face and experience homelessness may struggle with other issues, such as mental and physical health problems, poverty and domestic abuse, all of which may carry their own social stigma. However, it is arguable that, once applied, the label 'homeless person' becomes the primary signifier and that this label may reduce the perception of the person's worthiness of public empathy and assistance:

> *'in addition to the hardships of the homeless condition itself, homeless people suffer stigmatization by their fellow citizens. The results also suggest that the robust tendency to blame the disadvantaged for their predicament holds true for modern homelessness as well'* (Phelan et al, 1997, p.1).

It can be argued that homeless legislation is a method of social control that, in common with legislation such as the 1834 Poor Law, seeks to control those considered undeserving or a drain upon resources through restricting or denying the rights of access to public space and citizenship:

> *'All of us – even the truly homeless – live somewhere, and each therefore stands in some relation to land as owner-occupier, tenant, licensee or squatter. In this way land law impinges upon a vast area of social orderings and expectations, and exerts a fundamental influence upon the lifestyles of ordinary people'* (Grey & Symes, 1981 in Fox, 2002, p.581).

Connections between forms of exclusion of citizenship with unequal access and prospects to own property have been explored in research:

> *'... the failure to provide to all members of society an equal opportunity to secure the rights and privileges of citizenship which come from property ownership. Overwhelming evidence documents current and persistent inequality in access to property ownership for some in our society'* (Craig-Taylor, 1998 p.1).

This line of enquiry draws from Marshall's theory of citizenship (Marshall & Bottomore, 1992). Marshall proposes that citizenship is composed of three basic forms of rights; these are civil, political and social rights. For Marshall it is the interplay and interdependence of these rights that constructs and maintains citizenship. Through

Marshall's theory, homelessness undermines citizenship by reducing or negating an individual's exercise of their political rights. An individual who is primarily concerned with meeting their basic needs of food and shelter cannot actively participate in accessing their political rights and issues relating to not having access to a place to live constrain their civil rights, such as access to public space.

It is arguable that a policy of 'policing the poor' is undertaken through enforcing restrictions on behaviour and access to areas increasingly categorized as 'private property'. Such policies are frequently adopted more regularly and enacted more aggressively in America: urban policy developments aimed at restricting access to public space and 'managing' homeless people appear to be increasing in scope and scale. Research highlights the impact of urban policies operating in American cities on the homeless as constituting:

> *'a deepening backlash against the presence of the visible poor in public spaces, the product of more aggressive policing and the fortressing of downtown areas'* (DeVerteuil, 2006, p.109).

However, there is increasing evidence of similar approaches becoming common in Europe (Doherty, et al, 2008). Waquant (2009) critiques the operation of neo-liberalism as a means of criminalising poverty and the poor. Behaviours deemed as inconsistent with the operation of a consumer society, such as homelessness, are criminalised and the transgressor's citizenship deferred through the use of policies excluding such behaviour from public space:

> *'...urban nomad is labelled a delinquent (through a municipal ordinance outlawing panhandling or lying down on the sidewalk, for instance) and finds himself treated as such; and he ceases to pertain to homelessness as soon as he is put behind bars. The "legal construction of the homeless as bare life" abridges his or her rights, effectively reduces him to a noncitizen, and facilitates criminal processing'* (Feldman, 2004 in Waquant, 2009 pp. xxi-xxii).

It could be contended that homeless people retain their full rights to citizenship as they are entitled to vote in elections on production of a temporary address, such as a hostel, although it is arguable that until the introduction in the United Kingdom of the

Representation of the People Act 2000, the nature of the electoral registration system made it unlikely that homeless people could vote in an meaningful capacity. Furthermore, for those rough sleeping accessing a temporary address can prove an insurmountable barrier to political participation.

An agenda promoting the responsibilities and duties of citizens within the dominant market based economy and society, which arguably gathered pace under New Labour and has remained a consistent feature of Conservative welfare policy, impacts upon how poor and homeless people are perceived and expected to behave (Lund, 1999; MacLeavy, 2008). A model of citizenship and community based upon ideals of individual responsibility and morality is arguably one that draws attention to the individual failings of homeless people and obscures and deflects away from the wider causes of inequality, poverty and homelessness (Imrie & Raco, 2003). Such a conceptualisation of citizenship and community may also be linked to the possible move towards a system of asset-based welfare. An asset-based welfare system replaces the model of universal citizenship rights, founded upon ideals of solidarity and reciprocity, with an approach that sees the state as responsible for creating the terms and conditions for people to become independent and active citizens. Such a welfare system is underpinned by participation in the waged economy and private home ownership (Ronald & Elsinga, 2012). For example, home ownership is promoted as the most positive form of tenure (Ronald, 2008) as it constitutes the creation of an asset from which one may then draw upon in times of need, such as in old age, and thus not become reliant upon state assistance. To meet the requirements of restructuring of welfare, homeless organisations may be driven to accept policies and initiatives that seek to promote self-reliance and individual responsibility. For example, access to housing is becoming increasingly contingent upon compliance with work and behaviour agreements, and creating 'meaningful activity', which is often shorthand for increasing employability skills, and this is an area that homeless organisations are increasingly finding is linked to tenders and contractual funding agreements (Phelan & Norris, 2008; Whiteford, 2007).

Such trends in the changing nature of welfare provision tie into notions of self-help and the acceptance of a smaller role for the state. It is at this juncture that ABCD may be perceived to be a double edged sword. It may be seen as a corollary system in

reducing state welfare expenditure, but equally as means of promoting the development of community assets and particularly forms of social capital and networks which may assist the poorest in managing and possibly resisting the changing nature of welfare.

The policing of public space and the primacy of the individual's rights of ownership and security may also be increasing the marginalisation of homeless people. The theory of designing or demarcating space as a means to alter or control human behaviour stems from the work of Oscar Newman. An American architect and city planner, Newman (1972) developed the theory that people who felt 'territorial obligation' to a particular living space would naturally defend this area as a community. The term, defensible space, was coined and had a lasting impact upon urban design. Drawing on Newman's theory Alice Coleman (1985) theorised that housing design, in particular state-provided tower block flats in London, and not primarily poverty, was one of the key factors in creating crime and anti-social behaviour. Her work was of influence to Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who appointed Coleman as an advisor to the Department of the Environment. Coleman's theory has been critiqued through its reduction of the role of poverty and inequality in social issues and as an attack on state provided housing (Spicker, 1987). Coleman's theory was influential in the instigation of the Right To Buy policy in the 1980s which has been heavily criticised for reducing the number of council houses and negatively impacting upon homeless levels in the UK. Klein (2008) identifies the policy of Right to Buy as an example of the *shock doctrine* in operation:

> *'Those who could became homeowners, while those who couldn't faced rents that were almost twice as high as before. It was a divide and conquer strategy, and it worked: the renters continued to oppose Thatcher, the streets of Britain's large cities saw a visible increase in homelessness, but the polls showed that more than half of the new owners did switch their party affiliation to the Tories'* (Klein, 2008, p.135).

The ideological success of this policy can be highlighted through the reality that despite the election of successive Labour governments, Right to Buy remained and is indeed now being revisited under the Cameron administration. However, to ensure

that towns and cities remain primarily sites for consumption measures for excluding homeless people from the streets are becoming increasingly hostile in intent.

The increasing use of 'hostile architecture' to influence behaviour and exclude poor and homeless people has been reported in the media (Quinn, 2014). 'Hostile architecture' includes the use of 'homeless spikes' to prevent people from sleeping in doorways or sheltered areas. Tesco agreed to remove such spikes from its Regent Street branch after facing public protest at this move (Halliday, 2014). However, such initiatives when coupled with an increasingly aggressive response to perceived forms of 'begging' demonstrate the possibility of urban citizenship being increasingly formulated through consumerist ideologies:

> *'The architectural historian Iain Borden says the emergence of hostile architecture has its roots in 1990s urban design and public space management. The emergence, he said, "suggested we are only republic citizens to the degree we are either working or consuming goods directly"'* (Quinn, 2014 np).

The consumerisation of citizenship and public space underpins the theory that the poor, and particularly those most visible such as the street homeless, become perceived as being 'failed' consumers, individuals who do not conform to the new social reality of material consumption and work as a means to facilitate this:

> *'Faith in social amelioration and a sustainable future appears to be in short supply as neoliberal capitalism performs the dual task of using education to train workers for service sector jobs and produce lifelong consumers' (Giroux & Giroux, 2006).*

However, for some people becoming a 'lifelong' consumer will be an impossible dream. Such people represent either a deviant threat to the social norm or an uncomfortable reminder of the exclusionary and precarious nature of a consumer based society (Bauman, 2001; Standing, 2011). As such, homeless individuals are deemed as in need of 'reintegration' into society; this will be undertaken through either the approach of assistance, if the individual accepts the status of a client and the services on offer, or discipline through policing and exclusion should the homeless person resist or refuse to engage.

Creating and maintaining the neo-liberal project requires the enforcement of a dominant ideology. The ideology of inferiority and superiority and the deserving and the undeserving lies at the heart of the system of inequality and injustice and is founded upon the pillars of coercion and consent (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci identified the nature of hegemony and argued that only through a process of emancipatory education may hegemonic structures of power and oppression be identified and then challenged. Gramsci's theory of hegemony is of critical importance and will be analysed in depth later in the thesis. However at this point it is important to understand hegemony as the process through which dominant ideologies, such as neo-liberalism are promoted and sustained. Gramsci extended upon the Marxist theory of coercion through the forces of the state and overt power to include the parallel process of ideological persuasion or indoctrination. In effect this is a process of persuading people to accept the dominant ideology through the transmission of these ideas into the realms of the family and cultural institutions such as schools, religious organisations and most powerfully through the media channels. We have been 'conditioned' to believe that the route to being a successful and useful member of society is to work hard in education and employment and reap the rewards of consumerism. Those who are poor or excluded are to be blamed for their position through their personal failures.

It is in the context of hegemony that we may situate the 'underclass' debate and as a contemporary example the creation and demonization of the working class through the ideology of the 'chav'. Owen Jones's book *Chavs* (2011) charts the development of a public disparaging of working class identity that has become a cipher for the supposed degenerate and feckless underclass. Jones analyses how the 'chav' was created as part of the neo-liberal political project to weaken solidarity and political resistance from the working class. To achieve this aim a combination of political, media, educational and criminal justice strategies were deployed to construct a hegemonic belief in the irreversible decline of the working class into an immoral underclass. This narrative removes any discussion of the socially constructed nature of inequality and oppression from the table and obscures the depredations of the wealthiest from the public gaze. Further evidence for the political nature and construction of those groups labelled as 'the underclass' can be viewed through the

theory of social abjection (Tyler, 2013). Social abjection theory draws from the work of Bataille (1999) who highlighted how sections of the population are excluded from society and 'used' as images of disgust in the pursuit of political power and social control:

> *'Whether this marginality is an effect of an inability or unwillingness to be sucked into proletariat classes of factory workers and servants, or in the case of fascist (or colonial) systems of power a consequence of perceived racial inferiority, these surplus populations are separated from social life to the degree that they are "disinherited" [from] the possibility of being human'* (Bataille, 1999, p. 11).

The effect of the politics of dehumanisation is to create and maintain social divisions and cleavages within society which can then be used as forms of political capital and social control; in Gramscian terms, the majority of the population accept the 'reality' that 'these people' (be they the homeless, refugees or the unemployed) are in some way inferior to the majority and at fault for their own predicament. Furthermore, they are seen as a threat to 'healthy' society, in many ways as a disease of the social system that needs to be avoided and excluded to avoid contagion.

Neo-liberals seeks to use such divisions to ingrain the ideology of the individual as the citizen consumer: we are what we own and consume, and those who refuse or, as a result of their own ineptitude or sloth (so runs the narrative), are unable to partake in the pursuit of unrestrained consumption are thus failed consumers and failed citizens. Such people become the scapegoats for failures of government and the politics of greed and corruption. For example the notion of the struggle between the moral 'strivers' and the feckless 'skivers' in contemporary British political discourse aptly highlights the workings of social abjection (Mason, 2013).

2.8   Reflections

This chapter has highlighted some of the complexities surrounding understanding the phenomenon of homelessness. Defining such concepts as home and homeless appear open to contestation and inhabit ever shifting terrain. However, it would appear that

homelessness needs to examined in a wider context than, has often been the tradition, of viewing homelessness primarily through the lens of the dominant ideology of home and the need for/loss thereof.

Statistical evidence, particularly concerning numbers of 'rough sleepers', appears difficult to quantify and at odds with the position of those experiencing and working with 'rough sleepers'. The carrot and stick approach of offering housing options or punitive control methods, such as 'hostile architecture', appear to have negligible impact on reducing or assisting the number of people sleeping rough or classified as long-term homeless. I would argue that an understanding of the narrative of homelessness, from the point of view of homeless people, presents a better opportunity to grasp the complexity and multifaceted nature of homelessness. Maintaining and reclaiming a sense of self-worth, connectivity and citizenship appear areas that are often relegated to secondary concerns. Finding someone a 'roof over their head' is often considered the end point in working with homeless people: after all surely then they are no longer homeless?

It is arguable that the stigma and loss of status attached to homelessness is damaging to people's psyche and mental/emotional well-being; many long-term homeless people may in fact remain psychologically 'homeless' regardless of their acquisition of shelter. Homelessness is arguably often represented as an individual issue divorced from wider socio-economic and political considerations. The present dominance of political and economic neo-liberalism continues to reify the act of consumption and consumerism. Homeless people, in particular those who live on the streets in urban areas, are often considered a threat to consumer led ideology by their presence. They may highlight the inconvenient truth of levels of inequality that constitute a component of the consumerist economy; as people who have nothing to offer the consumer ideal they are viewed as failed or defective consumers, and thus policies are designed and enacted to make them invisible or stigmatised as deserving of their position.

At the macro level people such as refugees, or those labelled as 'asylum seekers' or 'economic migrants' are often without a home, both in the sense of a form of shelter and in the shape of a place to belong. In the example of the current plight of Syrian

refugees who are fleeing war and oppression, the language used by the media is often misleading. People are often labelled as migrants rather than refugees. The term migrant now carries negative connotations of people choosing to leave their homes, rather than having no option but to go. It appears that a negative stereotype of homeless people exists from the macro level of the status of asylum seekers down to the micro level of the social construction of representations of the homeless. A negative discourse of assigning stigma and individual blame to people who are homeless, in the varying contexts this may take, appears to be in danger of becoming a cultural norm.

In common with poverty, crime and other social issues, homelessness may be more critically examined and understood through a synthesis of structural and an individual approaches. Like everyone, homeless people have individual needs and unique biographies, which need to be understood within the context of wider social and economic processes. The causes of homelessness are complex and the convergence and impacts of economic and social forces upon individuals and communities requires a commitment to challenge oppressive social and political processes. For instance, issues around power and discrimination are brought starkly into view when working with homeless people. It is necessary to question the nature of the dominant role of neo-liberalism in creating and maintaining a system where such levels of injustice and inequality are seen as social norms and failings on the part of individuals, families and communities. It is within this context that one must situate ABCD and question whether it is a tool that can be used to help to liberate people or if it is nothing more than a method of amelioration or, more cynically, a means of legitimising inequality and injustice through handing the problems created by the neo-liberal system back to communities and individuals.

Ultimately 'home' appears to be something that one person cannot simply give to another, as Steinbock (1999, p.3) observed:

> *'The home is not something "we" possess; a home cannot be given to others from an objective third person perspective because home is something that is co-generated with others and is experienced as such from the perspective of participation'.*

The notion of home being co-generated and situated within the context of community is the definition that I have chosen to work with throughout the thesis. This definition rings true in the context of Freirean theory and complements taking a participatory and emancipatory standpoint when examining the issue of homelessness, through accepting as individuals, communities and society as something we are all responsible for and as a by product of the neo-liberal doctrine of competition and greed we could potentially become a casualty of.

The following chapter will explore the nature of citizenship and client-hood through examining the theory of Asset-Based Community-Development (ABCD). It will undertake an analysis of the history and key theoretical concepts underpinning ABCD and apply them to *The Big Issue* homeless magazine in an effort to discover whether linking ABCD to initiatives concerning homeless people can provide an emancipatory approach integrating the wider social and personal issues faced by homeless people. The concept of community will be discussed and notions of how community is theorised through ABCD will be explored and critiqued. The link between homelessness and deferred or denied citizenship will be explored further through the association of social capital with opportunity and disadvantage.

CHAPTER 3: WHAT IS ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT?

The previous chapter examined definitions of homelessness and suggested that the term may stigmatise and disempower those so labelled. This chapter will critically examine the possibility that strength- or asset-based theories may hold the potential for challenging some of the negative aspects linked to concepts of homelessness. Hill (1991) highlights that homeless people can be seen as:

> *'a resourceful, determined, and capable group that proactively deals with the lack of resources in their consumer environment* (Hill, 1991, p.299).

Recognising, valuing and utilising the strengths and assets of individuals and groups form the backbone of the theory of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), and thus may present a theory to inform a shift in perceptions and methods for working with homeless people. The previous chapter highlighted the contentious nature of the debate around definitions of homelessness. To expand upon this debate the terms 'homeless community' and a 'culture of homelessness' will be explored within a discussion of the complexities of defining community (Ravenhill, 2008). The concept of community development will be discussed in the context of whether ABCD offers a different and coherent approach.

The main aspects of community development have been suggested to be:

* *informal education* – learning that takes place predominantly through direct involvement in community activities
* *collective action* – finding the power of combined voices and determination; the strength of many people acting for their mutual benefit or to champion the interests of those who cannot stand up for themselves
* *organization development* – helping groups and bodies to evolve a form that enables the members to achieve their goals, to act legally and to be accountable to the membership and wider community (Gilchrist & Taylor, 2011, pp. 10-12).

In conjunction, Ledwith (2016) reminds us that community development should be committed to:

- *Principles of social justice and environmental justice;*
- *A vision of a just and sustainable world;*
- *Values of equality, respect, dignity, trust, mutuality and reciprocity;*
- *A process of critical consciousness through popular education (critical pedagogy), practical projects and collective action for change;*
- *A theory base that helps to analyse power and discrimination;*
- *Contextualising practice in its political context* (Ledwith, 2016, p.148).

It is contestable whether ABCD constitutes a process for creating collective action beyond the level of the community, as theorised as a neighbourhood or place of residence. It arguably does not draw from a theory base to analyse power and discrimination and the focus upon strengths rather than needs may possibly be detrimental to the weakest members of society.

There are many definitions of community development, for example the United Nations defined it in 1948 as:

> *'Community development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for its whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative'* (Head, 1979, p.101).

The United Nations definition offers an all encompassing notion of community development that is arguably heavily premised upon ideals of self-help. This is an important point as there may be schism within community development theory: certain approaches, such as ABCD, are arguably wedded to the notion of developing self-help and self-reliance within communities whilst downplaying the impact of structural inequalities in society, as opposed to those that are more active in seeking to empower communities to take a more political and active approach in bringing about social change to challenge social inequality (Jacobs, 1986, 1994; Adams, Dominelli & Payne 2009). There have been arguments raised that community development needs to have a clearer and more limited remit:

'... there is some merit in restricting the notion of community development to those approaches that focus on the cultivation of local democracy, mutual aid, local networks and communal coherence. Economic development and the quality and appropriateness of state and other services may well form a part of this attention – but are not the foci around which activity revolves' (Smith, 2013).

While this argument has merit there is the possibility that such a definition could further weaken the emancipatory nature of community development, and thus approaches that seek to ameliorate and work with the nature of a society that maintains high levels of inequality, rather than challenge them, may become ever more mainstream.

This chapter will examine the differences between strength- and needs-based approaches. It will provide a succinct history of the key ideas and concepts underpinning the theory and practice of ABCD, examine how the concepts of social assets, social capital and resilience are theorised and implemented through ABCD, and provide a case study arguing possible theoretical links between *The Big Issue* magazine and ABCD to demonstrate the wider impact of the theory. It will engage with the debate that ABCD may be in danger of being co-opted into the mainstream through policy developments such as the 'Big Society', as interpreted through the increasing use of voluntary led services in response to the pressures of austerity measures (Norman, 2012; Ishkanian & Szreter, 2012). This chapter will conclude with a summary of the facets that combine to construct the idea and practice underlying ABCD and question whether this level of complexity and diversity constitutes one coherent theory or a number of diverse strands fused together under the ABCD label.

3.1   *ABCD: Challenging Dependency?*

ABCD stands in opposition to organisations and services that are considered to promote or entrench ideas of dependency. However, the term dependency is often deployed without due consideration as to its problematic nature. Dependency is a contested term open to multiple interpretations. Fraser and Gordon (1994) argue that dependency is an ideological and social construct and define the term through four possible related fields of meaning:

1. Economic dependency

2. Socio-legal dependency

3. Political dependency

4. Moral or psychological dependency

The fields are not discrete and interact with each other throughout a person's lifecycle; for example, throughout childhood people will experience high levels of dependency upon parents, family and carers, yet this is not defined through notions of limited capacity as may be seen as the case for elderly people (Lloyd, 2003). Fraser and Gordon's (1994) model is useful in highlighting that dependency is not something that is limited to certain groups of people but is a universal feature of the human condition. Dependency is often theorised through the lens of being an individual attribute, rather than the product of a complex network of social relations. The operation of the welfare state has been theorised as a system that may assist in creating forms of dependency for elderly people, through restricting access to employment via retirement and inadequate pensions and healthcare support policies (Townsend, 1981). McKnight (1995) argues that professional welfare organisations are reliant upon creating and maintaining people as clients under a form of dependency:

> *'The recipient is much more valuable in her dependency; she is a national resource. If she were a productive member of our society, the net loss to gross national product could be very significant because she may never produce as much income as the income derived from her dependency'* (McKnight, 1995, p.97).

Whilst there may be merit in the theory that certain forms of welfare may be disempowering, there is a danger that through linking dependency to economics, as in the above quote, the nature of care becomes ever more commodified and linked to notions of cost and benefit. Women in particular suffer through care being seen as an, often unpaid or poorly paid, duty to perform whilst welfare assistance may be further stigmatised as promoting dependency.

Dependency may commonly be measured through notions of disability or incapacity, using markers related to needs rather than strengths. Such definitions link into the theoretical basis for asset-based approaches. However, feminist theory presents a

challenge to dependency being viewed as a purely negative state (Baltes, 1996). Dependency upon other people may form the basis for the common bonds of humanity and solidarity, and promote empathy and care. Seeking and accepting assistance from others may also display an adaptive response that maximises resources. As a theory, ABCD arguably defines dependency through overly negative terms and may downplay the reality that every individual will inhabit various stages of dependency experienced in different degrees throughout their life. A person receiving help or support from members of their family or the local community, rather than from a professional or state-based institution, is the preferred means of care put forward though ABCD; however, despite the care being provided in an informal rather than professional capacity the relationship will still demonstrate some characteristics of dependency. The term dependency will feature throughout the thesis and it is used in the context of a contested notion that carries both positive and negative connotations.

3.2   Strength- and Needs-Based Approaches

Across the spectrum of community development/organisation, the concepts of defining and mobilising community strengths are intrinsic to accomplish the goal of meeting some form of defined need. How such ideals of strengths and needs are viewed and how they operate are of key importance. The following section will examine the perceptions of strength- and needs-based approaches in the context of ABCD.

Historically, services have been designed and delivered to individuals and communities through what has become recognised as needs-based approaches. A needs-based approach takes the form of governmental or other professional agencies undertaking a needs-based assessment of an individual or community to identify deficiencies or deficits and implementing a program to address these. At the macro level, governments invest in people and places through allocating public resources, and to conduct and enact policies in the most efficient and effective manner needs assessments are undertaken. It is arguable that directly targeted people-based policies are more effective than indirect place-based policies. Place-based initiatives may

become counter-productive through displacing the poorest people they are initiated to assist, whilst people-based policies may be critiqued as creating an environment of dependency and client-hood (UN Habitat, 2008). At the meso level local government, statutory, third-sector agencies and organisations seek to gain resources to address and manage what are deemed to be social or community issues. At the micro level individuals and communities must demonstrate their needs to gain resources; this approach creates a climate of negativity and competition as the greater the needs and deficiencies assessed the greater the chance of receiving resources appears (Illich, 1978; McKnight, 1995). Whilst individuals and communities may have genuine needs there is an argument that these can be addressed through a more positive and constructive approach; such approaches are labelled as strength- or asset-based.

Strength-based practice could be argued to have existed in some form for as long as people have worked collaboratively. However, as a theory grounded in academic practice strength-based approaches are comparatively recent. The development of strength-based models is generally attributed to a research team from the University of Kansas in response to American social work practice being dependent upon psychoanalytical and medicalised approaches (Healy, 2005).

ABCD has developed upon the idea of the strength-based approach as a critique of the dominant needs-based way of working. Strength-based approaches begin from the position of defining and harnessing the positive aspects of individuals. These aspects may be defined as resilience, capabilities, relationships, practical skills and access to social and economic resources. Practitioners identify any factors that assist in dealing with challenges as strengths and seek to work collaboratively to develop and utilise these for positive change. For example the 'recovery' model operated in the treatment of mental health disorders and addictions seeks to work with the individual in using their own strengths and goal setting to assist them onto a recovery pathway (Anthony, 1993; Jacobson & Curtis, 2000; Barker & Buchanan-Barker, 2005). In comparison, a needs-based approach would seek to identify the problem and use a form of professional treatment or intervention to cure the problem (Shepherd, Boardman & Slade, 2008). ABCD practitioners seek to work with communities through establishing the strengths and assets within a community and putting those to work to benefit the community to develop their own goals and aspirations.

Developed by Kretzmann & McKnight (1993), ABCD critiques the needs-based model of delivering more professional services/resources input that begins from the belief that something is broken within the community and is in need of a professional to fix the problem. The ABCD approach argues that the need-based model reduces community capability through focussing on the identification of individual and community weaknesses, problems and inadequacies. ABCD offers a paradigm shift, proposing that all communities have strengths, gifts and talents and that through mobilizing these resources the community can be empowered to take a proactive and empowering approach to developing their community:

> '*The asset approach values the capacity, skills, knowledge, connections and potential in a community. It doesn't only see the problems that need fixing and the gaps that need filling. In an asset approach, the glass is half-full rather than half empty*' (Foot & Hopkins, 2010, p. 7).

The critique of the needs-based model argues that prioritising need identification is a reductive approach that defines needs as individual problems and deficiencies in need of a cure. Problems become discrete units and are removed from a wider social context, and a binary is created between those with needs and those who provide assistance to the needy. Resources are given to professionals to assist in curing needs rather than provided directly to the community, and the status of client may deepen a sense of dependency. A culture is created whereby help comes from outside the community in the form of professional services and any sense of community connection and capacity is weakened (McKnight & Block, 2012).

Facets of ABCD arguably incorporate ideological theories that define state-based welfare services in an overly negative manner. They are often described as disempowering, dependency creating and complicit in maintaining a lack of coping or resilience within individuals and communities. It may also be critiqued for neglecting the view that individuals and communities experience problems, such as unemployment or ill-health, as outcomes associated with structural inequalities and market failure (MacLeod & Emejulu, 2014). ABCD developed from within the framework of American culture and philosophy; American culture is arguably more deeply founded upon beliefs centred on individualism and liberty than is the case in many European or other states. Feldman and Zaller (1992) theorised that the political

ideology and history of the United States influences how both conservative and liberal thinkers view the idea of state welfare:

> *'The elements of the tradition most commonly invoked were suspicion of big government, humanitarianism, the Protestant ethic, and above all, economic individualism'* (Feldman & Zaller, 1992, p.292)

McKnight & Block draw heavily from the theory of De Toqueville's (1945) *Democracy in America*, concerned with the positive social and political benefits of associations:

> *'Voting, he observed, is vital but is the power to give power away – that is, to delegate your will to a representative. An association, on the other hand, is a means to make power rather than giving it away'* (McKnight & Block 2012, p. 125).

This quote is one of the few within the canon of ABCD that discusses the idea of power. However, it appears to suggest that associational power is in some way less oppressive than governmental power without further exploring the dynamics of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability and economic equality that occur within and between communities and are inherently linked with structural and political relationships at the macro level. Communities may be explored using the analogy of nesting boxes or Russian dolls that fit together. Community in this guise can be thought of a set of interdependent relationships that start with the individual at the centre and radiate outwards from the intimate, family and relationships to the realm of the state, or beyond into the multi-national:

> *'Communities are best viewed as if they were Chinese nesting boxes in which less encompassing communities (families, neighbourhoods) are nestled within more encompassing ones (local villages and towns), which in turn are situated within still more encompassing communities the national and cross nationals ones (such as the budding European community) moreover, there is room for non-geographic communities which criss-cross the others, such as professional or work-based communities'* (Etzioni, 1995, p.32).

For communitarian thinkers, such as Etzioni (1995), community is based upon shared values and norms and is underpinned by the ideals of rights and responsibilities. Post-

modernist thinkers share the idea that community has been transformed through the evolution of communication and globalization to enable people to belong to multiple communities (Delanty, 2006). However, the operation of power and oppression, along the lines of race, gender, class and sexuality remains constant and it is arguable that the Western-led ideal of the global information and technology driven community may be detrimental to other forms and perceptions of community.

Arguably, a mistrust of 'big government' and institutions developed within American society, and still resonates there to a greater degree than in other societies. The theory of reducing the negative power of government and institutional life through associational and community life, while not without merit, is arguably reductive of positive social benefits, such as the welfare state and the National Health Service in the UK context. DeFilippis, Fisher & Shragge (2010) critique forms of community development, such as ABCD, as sometimes compromising modes of radical change through embedding reliance upon the neo-liberal economy and governments that ironically create their own form of dependent relationships.

British history and political culture have developed along a different path and it is arguable that a theory such as ABCD may be interpreted in very different forms dependent upon cultural and ideological factors:

> *'The UK does have its own history and traditions of community organizing. Adult and community education, the cooperative movement, urban farms, community media, and independent record labels all sprang from self help and community development projects'* (Thompson, 2005, p.204).

This is an important point when examining how ABCD is comparatively theorised and applied. Can ABCD based projects be structured and operate in the same manner in varying cultural contexts? Is ABCD philosophically and theoretically 'mature' enough to allow parallel forms of interpretation and application of the model, and if they are markedly different should such initiatives be labelled as ABCD-based?

John McKnight writes critically of the ever expanding health care industry in America and draws from the work of Ivan Illich (2002) to demonstrate the negative impacts that modern health systems may have upon individuals and society. Notions of resilience and recovery were developed primarily outside and against the medical system, for

example through mental health survivors groups and recovering substance abusers. Within contemporary public health systems, resilience and recovery have become enshrined concepts under the umbrella of strength-based approaches:

'Whilst the concepts of resilience and recovery, then, originated in anti-institutionalization movements, they have increasingly been incorporated into, and some would say co-opted by, medical reason and mental health policy. They have thus been re-figured: psychiatric experts now iterate that through recovery and resilience those who are deemed to have disordered minds can live "meaningful lives" despite the ostensible permanence of their "illness"' (Howell & Voronka, 2012, p.2).

However, in the UK the National Health Service has produced a wealth of documents purporting to incorporate asset-based working within health care services and delivery (Hills, 2004; Baggott, 2005; Morgan & Ziglio, 2007). Thereby we have witnessed a theory opposing the very nature of 'systems thinking' and provision being incorporated into said systems. The question arises: is ABCD theoretically weak and being co-opted into systems to reduce its impact or is it genuinely offering a radical alternative that is altering the way services are commissioned and delivered? Friedli (2012) questions the uncritical way that asset-based initiatives have been incorporated into the public health agenda and proposes such a shift in thinking has limited critique of the structural inequalities exacerbated through contemporary neo-liberal economic philosophy. Austerity and poverty are material realities linked to political processes and asset-based approaches do little to highlight or challenge such realities through offering a critique of welfare and system dependency that is disconnected from the wider operations of political economy. It has been argued that what are often conceived as 'street-level social issues' such as homelessness, prostitution or criminality often have their roots in policies and decisions taken by those in positions of power rather than in individual- or community-based defects:

'In fact, it could be argued that the causes of homelessness, drug dealing and prostitution are more tied to the suites than to the streets' (Diers, 2010, p.23).

Despite these critiques, ABCD may be seen as positively embracing possible universal psycho-social theories that assist in widening the definition of poverty to include the

non-material dimensions. Perhaps many needs-based approaches place too much emphasis upon resources at the expense of the psychological, emotional and communal needs of individuals and communities (Sen, 1984, 2004). To explore such issues further, a brief history of the development of ABCD will follow.

3.3   Asset-Based Community Development: Background

ABCD was developed as an alternative to the dominant needs-based theories. The development of welfare services has been linked to notions of paternalism and political pressures (Saint-Paul, 2011). State-based welfare systems have been viewed with suspicion as forms of social control by commentators from liberal, left and Marxist political viewpoints. A sense of resistance to many forms of state welfare provision can be examined through the continued existence of self-help organisations and the continued sense of stigma often related to receiving 'welfare':

> *'Historically, in the early stages of mass provision of public services, users of the services were largely seen as passive beneficiaries. This is still the dominant ethos of most services, but over the past twenty to thirty years a more sophisticated model of the relation between public services and their users has emerged'* (Chanan & Miller, 2013, p.4).

ABCD as a theory came to prominence in the 1990s, although it arguably draws upon older theories depending upon how it is categorised. The theory is heavily influenced by the philosophy of communitarianism, that individuals and communities are formed and held together by common norms and values (Etzioni, 1995). It may be appropriate to include historical actions of various self-help related movements under the heading of asset-based community development initiatives in their different guises (Wann, 1995). To illustrate, the pooling of resources and assets that underpinned the emerging co-operative movement and friendly societies in the 1800s epitomised the ideal of community development and resilience stemming from individual and communal ideals of self-help (Fraser, 1992). The work of the Charity Organisation Society (COS) under Octavia Hill sought to mobilise the 'assets' of resilience, thrift and sobriety to 'improve' the conditions among the working class, and is cited as a key component in the creation of the social work movement (Mowatt, 1961).

Canon Samuel Barnett, a founder member of the COS, became disillusioned at what he saw as the failure of the organisation to address the problems of the poor. Barnett was critical of the influence of professionals and experts, including those of the COS and went on to develop the University Settlement Movement as an alternative method of community work. Barnett's idea was radical in that he insisted that it was only through living in poor communities and working with the community, through co-operative education and cultural studies, in addition to advancing poverty relief programs that the conditions of the working class poor could be improved. Barnett rejected the tenets of what he considered the machinery of the Poor Law and philanthropy as soulless and harmful to the conditions of the poor. The Settlement Movement sought to establish a climate of equal worth and value between all members of the community, regardless of wealth or status:

> *'A settlement is simply a means by which men or women may share themselves with their neighbours; a club-house in an individual district, where the condition of membership is the performance of a citizen's duty; a house among the poor, where the residents may make friends with the poor'* (Barnett, 1898, p.11).

Echoes of Barnett's mistrust of the ministrations of experts and systems are clearly seen in contemporary ABCD theory:

> *'The community is the site for the relationships of citizens. And it is at this site that the primary work of a caring must occur. If that site is invaded, co-opted, overwhelmed, and dominated by service-producing institutions, then the work of the community will fail'* (McKnight, 1995, p.x).

The University Settlement Movement was led by and operated upon Christian, middle-class values of the established Anglican Church and the University system. Such institutions arguably constituted part of the 'service-producing institutions' and could be seen, however unwittingly, as furthering the state's aims of reducing dissent and promoting benevolent paternalism rather than developing community-based empowerment. However, the settlement movement continued to expand:

> *'Settlement houses had become a formidable force with some 56 in Britain by 1926 (41 of them in London) and approaching 400 being established in the United States by 1910'* (Infed.org, 2015).

William Beveridge, himself a member and resident of the University Settlement Movement (Harris, 1977), cautioned the need to be wary that the creation of the British Welfare State could weaken the role of the voluntary and self-help sector that he saw as one of *'the distinguishing marks of a free society'* (Beveridge, 1948 p.10). However, research suggests that the creation of the British Welfare state did not crowd out other forms of provision. Hilton and McKay (2011) argue that suggestions of the dissolution of the voluntary sector in the UK since the development of the modern welfare state have proven false. They theorise that although the terminology of self-help, civic society or the 'Big Society' may have become more complex, levels of participation in volunteerism and self-help movements continue to flourish. This argument runs counter to the view often underpinning those of theories promoting ABCD, that government and state-based intervention has weakened civil society and reduced citizen participation (McKnight, 1995; McKnight & Block, 2012).

Concern that examples of government or state interventions can 'crowd out' self-help, volunteerism and citizen-based community development has increased since the evolution of state provision in the 19th Century. It is arguable that through the use of associations and participatory education the University Settlement Movement demonstrated an early realisation of the benefits of social capital, a key component in ABCD:

> *'Perhaps the most significant in terms of practice was the use of the club or association. Learning through being part of an association, working so that members of groups gain satisfaction from their activities and relationships were central aspects of the work'* (Infed.org, 2015).

Such examples demonstrate the historical and ideological linkage between the wide variance of self-help movements and asset-based approaches.

The idea of 'community' being in crisis and of weakening social relationships stretches back to the classical social theories of Marx (1848), Durkheim (1972) and others – and continues to be contested terrain. In the UK there has been much debate concerning failing communities and the idea of a *'broken Britain'* has been used by political thinkers across the political spectrum (Fields, 2003; Duncan-Smith, 2006; Blond, 2010). Clements et al (2008) make the case that community is constantly evolving alongside

society and that ideals of a 'golden age of community' are myths supporting pessimistic theories of community on the precipice of destruction. The theory of ABCD may be open to the charge it makes against 'professional' services maintaining client 'needs'. ABCD depends upon a concept of communities in crisis, or being in a state of disempowered client-hood, for it to operate, and thus is possibly open to the charge of reinforcing this perception to establish the conditions for its deployment.

Community work as a distinct occupation came in to being in the 1960s. The Younghusband report (1959) defined community organisation as an approach that facilitated collaboration and was based around a strong belief in the promotion of education. The Calouste Gulbenkian Report (1969) extended upon this process and positioned community work as being 'at the interface between people and social change' (Ledwith, 2016, p.10). Community work was therefore considered as not only being a distinct occupation but also as an essential facet of professional practice for teachers, social workers and all professionals involved with the community. As is common with many professions the 'professionalisation' of the occupation leads to tensions between serving the people or the hierarchy, as may be viewed through the opposing positions of radical and ameliorative forms of community development. It is arguable that ABCD seeks to occupy 'professional' terrain through its relationship with governmental and public bodies, such as the NHS. This position is ironic as ABCD calls into question the need for and legitimacy of professional services whilst arguably seeking their favour and collaborating in such processes. Such tensions have a long history within the sphere of community development which the following examples will briefly highlight.

The establishment of Community Development Corporations (CDCs) in America in the 1960s were founded upon principles of grassroots democratic decision making and citizen-driven economic development initiatives (Tinker, 1961). A critique of the CDC initiative highlights that a shift towards a more institutional model of government funding and top-down management led to a focus upon communities' deficiencies and needs and away from harnessing local democratic citizen control (Silverman, 2001). In the UK, the Community Development Project (CDP) was launched in 1969.

The CDP was instated in a response to concerns for 'entrenched' levels of poverty existing within certain urban areas that could be detrimental to social cohesion and

wider democratic participation. The CDP initiative was founded on the basis that poverty was primarily a matter of cultural rather than structural deficits and that a *'culture of poverty'* (Lewis, 1969) was evident within certain sections of UK society. In answer to this the CDP sought to assist these communities through undertaking research and forging links seeking to build upon notions of resilience, self-help and participation. The researchers and community workers involved with the CDP faced a troubling dichotomy: on the one hand they were employed by the state to undertake this work but their research developed theories demonstrating that structural forces, such as de-industrialisation, poor housing and economic inequality were the root causes of the problems the communities faced. These findings were not what the government wished to discover and the CDP funding was terminated and soon ceased to operate (CDP Inter-Project Editorial Team, 1977).

The experiences of the CDC and CDP initiatives suggest that community development is often co-opted by governments to provide an ameliorative solution to social issues under the guidelines of placing such issues outside of the realm of structural and macro political/economic spheres. Such an approach often places community development in the unenviable position of balancing working for the benefit of the state and the community (London Edinburgh Weekend Return Group, 1979). However, the recognition of and challenges to the structures of oppression and poverty as presented by the key workers of the CDP marked the terrain of community development as a political activity seeking social justice and change. Contemporary theories, such as ABCD, are arguably removed from the political sphere of seeking social change and have their philosophical roots placed in developing self-help practices to ameliorate rather than challenge forms of social injustice.

At their core, asset-based approaches share the common belief that community development should begin from a position of discovering and harnessing strengths and possibilities rather than meeting deficiencies and needs (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Symons, 2005). ABCD incorporates ideas relating to the concept of 'strength-based working', the theory that individuals and communities have strengths that should be recognised, respected and utilised as the basis of community development and practice. The shift to the idea of a strength-based working model can be traced through the work of Aaron Antonovsky who developed the theory of salutogenesis in

the 1970s. Salutogenesis highlights the factors that support and promote human health and well-being, rather than looking at those that cause ill-health and disease. The model concentrates on understanding the resources and capacities used by individuals and communities to promote and maintain positive health and well-being. Antonovsky's (1987) research argues that some people manage periods of hardship and stress better than others due to an increased feeling of being able to manage and influence their situation and improve the outcome (Lindstrom & Eriksson, 2005). Antonovsky raised the question:

> *'What can be done in this 'community'—factory, geographic community, age or ethnic or gender group, chronic or even acute hospital population, those who suffer from a particular disability, etc.—to strengthen the sense of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness of the persons who constitute it?'* (Antonovsky, 1987, p.16).

McKnight and Block (2012) use a similar concept to Antonovsky in theorising that it is an individual's level of connectedness to a sense of community and active community participation that create a positive effect on levels of health, well-being and coherence:

> *'How long we live and how often we are sick are determined by our personal behaviours, our social relationships, our physical environment, and our income. We are the people who can change these things, individually and with our neighbours. Medical systems and doctors cannot'* (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.2).

The following section will examine the notion of 'assets' and how they may be defined, classified and utilised using ABCD.

3.4   *Defining Assets*

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993, p.25) define assets as *'the gifts, skills and capacities of individuals, associations and institutions within a community.'* Under ABCD, assets are defined in a very broad term, moving beyond the economic notions of assets as capital that can be used to generate economic wealth. ABCD arguably links assets with factors for creating and maximising opportunities for individuals and communities to thrive.

Assets are not simply synonymous with economic growth but are also a vital component in creating and maintaining individual and community health and well-being. Bebbington (1999) argues that assets are vital for people to have the ability to think and act and are thus a core component for human development. Such a definition of assets evolves from the theory of Maslow's (1968, 1970) hierarchy of needs. To promote self-actualisation and growth people need to cultivate and develop assets in the fields of the psychological, social and material. This demonstrates an interesting conversion between the notion of needs and assets; perhaps a hierarchy of assets within ABCD would be a useful development to bridge the theoretical gap between what defines a need or an asset.

The identification and deployment of individual and community assets is central to the premise of ABCD. Assets operate at the level of the individual, family, community and population promoting factors that buffer against life's stressors (Morgan & Ziglio, 2007). Assets which promote health are categorised as internal and external types: internal assets include commitment to learning, healthy and positive values, social skills, positive identity and self-control; external assets refer to support, safety, respect, boundaries, expectations and constructive use of time. However, defining what actually constitutes as asset is complex and highly contestable. For example, is the continuing life experience of a user of illegal substances an asset if deployed in a self-help group or research process? Clearly this knowledge may provide potential benefits for the wider community and would provide the individual with some of the internal and external assets listed, but can this individual's knowledge and experience be defined as constituting a community asset? A wide ranging and comprehensive definition of assets that is often cited in ABCD literature is provided by Foot and Hopkins (2009). They define an asset in the following terms:

- *The practical skills, capacity and knowledge of local residents.*
- *The passions and interests of local residents that give them energy for change.*
- *The networks and connections – known as 'social capital' – in a community, including friendships and neighbourliness.*
- *The effectiveness of local community and voluntary associations.*

- *The resources of public, private and third sector organisations that are available to support a community.*
- *The physical and economic resources of a place that enhance well-being* (Foot and Hopkins, 2010, p.9).

There is growing recognition that communities have a vital role to play in developing and maintaining public health. A recent Public Health England report supports the development of community asset-based partnerships for improving health and well-being, highlighting how other key strategic documents also embed this perspective:

'The NHS Five Year Forward View sets out how our health services need to change and argues for a new relationship with patients and communities. PHE's strategy, From Evidence into Action, calls for place-based approaches that develop local solutions, drawing on all the assets and resources of an area; integrating public services and also building resilience of communities in order to improve health and wellbeing for all and to reduce health inequalities' (South et al, 2015, p.4).

Public Health England's report is built around the concept of strength-based working and identifying and maximising individual and community 'assets':

'The assets within communities, such as the skills and knowledge, social networks and community organisations, are building blocks for good health' (South, et al, 2015, p.5).

It thus resonates with the definition provided by Foot and Hopkins (2010), which attempts to provide an inclusive and encompassing theory of what constitutes an asset. However, this may be critiqued as being overly light on detail regarding exactly what it is that notions of skills, capacities and resources constitute in reality. Asset-based models appear to predominantly link individual and community well-being to factors that could be described as within an individual's locus of control; factors such as a sense of competence, belonging, relationships and a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1987). Negative stressors, such as economic insecurity, discrimination, and a poor quality or dangerous living environment are either downplayed or seen as challenges that the community, using asset-based approaches, can tackle and overcome independent of wider macro structural realities:

'the assets agenda may marginalize discussions of significant structural and economic inequalities' (Macleod & Emejulu, 2014 p. 442).

Furthermore, assets such as community space, parks or recreation, and even the basics of a secure and affordable source of food are not apolitical and are indivisible from questions of equitable distribution and inequality. Contemporary patterns of employment call for flexibility and mobility which may impact upon community cohesion and neighbourliness, and may reduce the ability for people to develop the much vaunted necessity of social capital. Under such conditions implementing ABCD may be limited due to its emphasis on notions of a geographical space and dependence upon local residents/neighbourliness. In addition, the definition of assets under ABCD does not appear to include the forms of resistance applied by people who are oppressed within its criteria. For example, the withdrawal of labour or forms of non-participation within systems of oppression can be viewed as assets for promoting and developing social change (Scott, 1985); however, it is arguable that ABCD seeks to co-opt individuals into working within such systems rather than in resisting or challenging structural forms of oppression.

The idea of community and the necessity for building and belonging to strong, resilient and inclusive communities is a defining concept of ABCD. To further explore the theory, a critique will follow of how community is conceptualised and defined within ABCD.

3.5   *Defining Community*

The term community remains emotive and highly contested. Green and Haines (2002) define community as a central concept within social science. However, community remains a highly disputed and often ideological concept defying any simplistic definition. In rudimentary terms community may be broadly conceptualised under the following categorisations:

- Place/territory: community as a geographical space or locality. People will have an attachment to this space and generally reside there.

- Cultural/identity: a group of people sharing the same identity may be defined as community. Examples such as ethnic or religious groups, or groups with a shared identity (although not necessarily a positive or self-identified label) e.g. the disabled or traveller community.

- Communities of interest: where people may share similar interests, it will often be defined by a common bond but not necessarily a location.

However community is theorised, the reality appears that it remains a fluid and evolving concept. Cohen (1985) described community in terms of a symbolic structure rather than a social practice. This led to new explorations of community, away from locality and social relations and towards a concern for meaning and identity. More contemporary definitions have expanded the term community to incorporate ideals of culture and communication:

'The persistence of community consists in its ability to communicate ways of belonging, especially in the context of an increasingly insecure world. In this sense, community as belonging is constructed in communicative processes rather than in institutional structures, spaces, or even in symbolic forms of meaning' (Delanty, 2006, p. 187).

Blackshaw (2010) theorises the possibility that 'community', as a reality, belongs to pre-industrial society and that modernity and individualism have rendered community a historical artefact that can only be grasped through hermeneutics. Community exists only in the reading and understanding of individuals and is always open to reinterpretation and evolution (Weeks, 1993).

Bauman (2007 p.1) argues that *'words have meanings: some words, however, also have a "feel".'* Community is such a word; it is a concept that many people may find easy to identify with and experience an innate or tacit understanding of or connection to. However, the reality of defining what 'community' is and is not appears a complex puzzle that remains contested by philosophers, academics and politicians. There are many competing theories and claims upon the representation and operation of community.

Contemporary community may be theorised as a temporary state that can be visited and left at will and may operate on many levels: community of interest, ideas, and lifestyles and not as a place of unchanging rules and norms as may have been the previous conception. Many theories maintain that community can be defined in relation to geographical boundaries or place and space, but also in ideas of identity, culture, religion, interest or history and myth. Community encompasses ideas of permanence while at the same time inhabiting a reality of fluidity, transition and change (Delanty, 2006; Bauman, 2007; Clements et al, 2008; Azzopardi & Grech, 2012). Conceptions of community do not always share this cosmopolitan viewpoint.

Historical notions of community are primarily constructed around the concept of geographical space and territory. Community is constituted as a physical area comprised of space and defined borders. Community in this respect is something that one belongs in and to, and contains many of the same emotional associations relating to home. In this sense community is bounded by notions of reciprocity, safety and security; it is the search for a sense of belonging and the fear of being excluded that reifies community. This understanding of community stems from the work of the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1955).

Tönnies classified social relationships into two primary types: *Gemeinshaft* relates to ideals of solidarity, kinship and familial bonds. It is civic in nature and calls forth romantic visions of a pre-industrial way of life. *Gesellschaft* is defined through a more contemporary vision of contractual relationships, individualism and transitory and fluid rhythms of an ever evolving society and social relationships. Critiques of modern society and the theory of neo-liberalism often cite the changing nature of society from one predominantly built upon notions of *Gemeinschaft* or community to a period of rapid change and social upheaval characterised through *Gesellschaft*, or a shift from community to society (Powell, 2009; Burkett, 2011).

Community is often portrayed as returning to an earlier, somehow 'superior' state of being; that rediscovering community in its 'natural' state provides a panacea for the modern ills of consumerism and atomisation or as a quest for a Miltonic paradise lost (Milton, 1909-14). For Tönnies (1955) and the early archaeologists of community, community was a casualty of industrial development and the price of progress. Similar calls for a return to a 'golden age' of community are apparent in ABCD theory. The

theory of Alexis de Tocqueville (1969) promoted the impact that citizen-built associations had upon the creation of America in the 1800s influences ABCD. In critique of ABCD, Macleod & Emejulu (2014) highlight the anti-state nature of ABCD through linking the theory to a communitarian reading of de Tocqueville. In common with Robert Putnam's (2000) commentary of the breakdown of community, ABCD seeks to assist in a return to an earlier ideal of community built upon forms of association. McKnight and Block (2012) draw heavily from examples of the strength of community in the age of the American pioneers. They exemplify the struggles of the settlers in forging their own authentic communities. McKnight (1995, p. 3-5) compares the destruction wrought by the invention of John Deere's steel plough upon the land previously farmed sustainably by the native Sauk people with the arrival of the grief counsellor into the modern community. For McKnight the industrialisation and commodification of emotional distress creates a contemporary community desert with the same efficiency as the steel plough created a physical desert. The solution proposed by ABCD is to return to an earlier imagined form of 'authentic community'.

McKnight and Block define a neighbourhood as a place where people live and sleep. They continue by defining a community in the following way:

> '...as a general term to describe what occurs outside systems and institutions. It also refers to an aggregation of people or neighbourhoods that have something in common. It is both a place and an experience of connectedness' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.5).

This definition poses problems in working with people who may be dispossessed or excluded. For example homeless people sleeping rough may not be classified as part of the neighbourhood, and many homeless people report suffering from a lack of connectedness and a feeling of alienation (Jewell, 2014). People can experience a loss of security and control through the process of de-institutionalisation, and communities are not always welcoming and friendly environments. It is highly contestable that community cannot be discovered within a system or institutional environment: schools and retirement homes, for example, may constitute forms of community and yet both may be defined as 'institutional' in nature.

Discourse around the nature and operation of community can be understood in the context of exclusion and discrimination as opposed to belonging and security. Legislation in the United States and the United Kingdom continues to restrict and curtail access to formerly public space through defining being homeless in such spaces as an act of 'anti-social' behaviour which offends the public norm. Doherty et al. (2008) argue that privatisation and increased urban surveillance amount to a contemporary form of enclosure. In America legislation has been enacted in twenty-one cities to restrict individuals and groups from sharing food with homeless people; this is accomplished through placing restrictions on feeding homeless people in public spaces (Stoops, 2014). The redefining of once public space as private or semi-private space, undertaken through government legislation, demonstrates the exclusive nature of community and highlights the difficulty in incorporating those classed as excluded from participating in ABCD. McKnight and Block recognise the problem associated with the exclusionary nature of community and suggest that a community that has developed a sense of coherence and competence can incorporate people from outside of its boundaries:

> *'And every neighbourhood necessarily creates outsiders by establishing boundaries. The question is what kind of boundary is it? Is it a boundary of superiority and exclusion, a dangerous place to approach? Or is it a place that has a welcome at the door*?' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.139).

A potential weakness in the theoretical robustness of ABCD is an apparent conflict between community as 'place and space' and inclusivity. Proponents of ABCD suggest that a return to an earlier community ideal would be socially beneficial. However, such communities arguably operated upon principles of homogeneity and sameness; often including gender and racial discrimination (Bauman, 2007). McKnight and Block's ideal pioneer community would have been small and constructed on the lines of family and kinship ties. Self-sufficiency and competence, traits ABCD defines as belonging to functioning communities often entail maintaining an insular approach to membership and growth. Such compositions of community will by definition struggle with ABCD's call to create inclusive communities (McKnight & Block, 2012).

The notion of belonging to sub-communities, such as a 'homeless community' carries multiple connotations and possible applications. A 'homeless community' may perform

similar functions to the operation of the general community from which a homeless person is excluded; for example it may be perceived to represent a place of friendship and safety or constitute a space where homeless people can feel a sense of belonging and shared identity. However, a 'homeless community' could also by definition be an exclusive space, whilst at the same time personal identification as belonging to the 'homeless community' could signify an acceptance of the reduced status that being homeless implies. In this context it may increase the barriers between people and prevent forms of solidarity from being recognised and developed. Linked to the notion of a 'homeless community' is the idea that there exists a 'culture of homelessness' (Ravenhill, 2008). Culture is an inherent feature of community and a 'culture of homelessness' may represent a problematic use of language. A perception of homeless people as largely constituting a culture based around begging, drinking, substance misuse and low-level criminality is arguably well-developed among many Western societies. The structural factors inherent in the causes of homelessness, such as housing costs and unemployment, may be disregarded in favour of defining homelessness through the individual behaviours of homeless people; thus the idea of a 'culture of homelessness' has clear similarities with the construction of the *'culture of poverty'* (Lewis, 1969). Both theories may be used as a means of blaming individuals and groups for their problems and may entrench exclusion through linking supposed 'sub-communities' to cultures defined as deviant. I would argue that through such definitions and processes the rights of the poorest in society are eroded and access to citizenship and participation is negated. These issues will be further explored within the findings chapters.

Academic theories of community often convey circular arguments that, in common with many texts around ideology or theory, provide more questions than possible working definitions; they may discuss what community *is* theoretically or ideologically, but struggle with the reality of establishing its everyday meaning and working. Perhaps community is best understood through an acceptance of complexity and an understanding of the conjunction between historical and cultural developments and political economy:

'Community is a complex system of interrelationships woven across social difference, diverse histories and cultures, and determined in the present by political and social trends' (Ledwith, 2012, p.34).

The complexity of meaning surrounding community raises an issue for the discipline of community development; which definition of the 'good' community is being ascribed to and who decides?

3.6   *Defining Development*

Human development is concerned to create an: *'enabling environment for people to live long, healthy and creative lives'* (UNDP, 2010, p. 12). The term development brings to mind notions of growth, change and evolution: a positive improvement in thought and action at the personal and/or societal level. However, a development can also describe a negative change of state; the development of a cancerous cell within the human body or the development of a political movement embodying views and policies many may find troubling, such as the far-right British National Party. Community development takes place within this complex and contested area and differing methods and theories of development have taken shape, of which ABCD is but one incarnation. What makes ABCD different from any other form of community development, that may equally lay claim to being asset-based, is open to question:

> *'The emphasis on assets is intended to restore balance towards local people rather than outside institutions, generating aspiration and confidence, and reducing dependence. But some of us will always be suspicious of anything that brands itself into an institution. And you don't have to be a card-carrying sceptic to wonder what the first two initials add: all community development is asset-based, or should be'* (Harris, 2011, np).

Harris raises the point that *all* community development, in the widest context, is asset-based and the ABCD label is more of an update on already existing community development theory and practice than a new initiative. However, the position that all community development entails an aspect of asset-based working is contested in that some traditional approaches are critiqued as being founded upon the idea that

development should begin by establishing the problem/s and focus upon meeting the community's needs (Henry, 2013; Peters, 2013; Hipwell, 2009; Ledwith 2012). Kretzmann (2010) theorises that it is through such a process that community engagement and solidarity can be undermined: that funding is targeted at solving problems, some of which are found to be more complex and interlinked than previously thought, leading to disillusion and apathy within the community when progress is slow or halting, and a cycle of dependency and despondency can become the norm.

It is arguable that 'community development' in its myriad forms has, in common with social and welfare policy, developed and evolved not in any pre-ordered or structured method but as a spasmodic and gradual reaction to issues and conditions within set time and spatial 'territories':

> *'The spread of community practice was not the product of a unified theory or policy but of a growing awareness...that post-industrial society was characterised by a decline in organic communities and an increase in isolation and anomie...'* (Chanan & Miller, 2013, p.8).

ABCD highlights the key difference in this approach to other forms of community development as taking place at the outset of the development process, by explicitly seeking out what are the strengths and resources within the community and proposing that development will come from the community and not outside 'experts'. In critique, we may ask whether there is a danger of community development becoming a matter solely for local communities, and reducing or ignoring wider social issues of inequality and exclusion. Practitioners involved with radical or emancipatory theories of community development have voiced concerns around co-option and control being pursued under the guise of development (Berner and Phillips, 2005; Ledwith 2012). The concept of citizenship and the rights and responsibilities this entails are intrinsic within community development. A communitarian position based upon active and responsible citizenship could champion ABCD as activating and increasing citizenship participation. However, a counter position could be that ABCD reduces citizenship to the individual and community spheres and endangers the notions of citizenship as underpinning solidarity and common welfare (Macleod & Emejulu, 2014).

The linkage of the words 'community' and 'development' appears a wholly positive term that encapsulates the notion of positively growing and strengthening an existing community. It could be perceived that human progress can be understood as an ongoing process of continual 'community development' from the micro level of individual and communal relations up to the macro level development of states, empires and world-wide organisations, such as the United Nations. However, one should remain aware that the roots of 'community development' specifically in the Western European/American application of the term stem from the process of colonialism. Mayo (1975) argues that 'community development' was concocted to assist with the administration and productivity of British colonies in the challenging aftermath of World War two. If conditions for economic growth and improving productivity were not to be found naturally developing within the local 'community' then outside intervention, in the form of 'community development' projects, such as those improving standards of education or farming techniques were to be delivered. The argument here is not that this form of community development is negative per se but to highlight that the benefits accrued were not primarily to be appreciated by the local colonised community. It is arguable that colonially inspired forms of 'community development', and their perceived failure in providing tangible benefits for communities, influenced the struggles for independence and decolonialisation.

During this period the concept of community organisation also gathered pace in America (Alinsky, 1989). Community organisation sought to mobilise those adversely affected by political and social structures into offering effective resistance strategies. Examples would be the mobilisation of working class, often economically disadvantaged, migrant communities in America to fight for a measure of equality in pay and working conditions, or the struggle for racial equality waged by African Americans. Community organisation differs from community development in that it seeks to assist those with limited power in challenging the powerful, whereas community development has often been initiated to assist in ameliorating social problems without explicitly challenging structural systems. Although there is disagreement about the different approaches of community organisation and community development there are many points of conversion.

It is arguable that while ABCD takes a less radical and confrontational approach than the Alinsky school of community organisation, it does draw heavily from many of the key points. For example, ABCD shares the assumption that the community must set the agenda and remain in charge of the process for change. Thompson discusses how Alinsky-inspired school organising in Chicago draws upon ABCD:

> *'they propose that school staff begin to shift asymmetrical power relations by assessing the community's assets and working to build trust based on mutual respect'* (Thompson, 2005, p.202).

A major fault line in the process of community development appears to be that on the one hand it champions notions of self-help, empowerment and community-led organisation, while on the other the resources necessary for development are controlled by exterior forces, such as the state, corporations or non-governmental organisations, who maintain control of projects, expenditures and ultimately the bulk of any gains/profits. Historically the costs of failed community development projects are handed firmly back to the local populace, often with long-term negative social and/or financial impacts. Burkett (2011) examines the opportunities and threats facing community organisations under the paradigm of neo-liberalism. She contends that organisations must be able to negotiate within a marketised framework and that the binary choice of for or against neo-liberalism is not a viable option. She summarises the dilemma facing community organisations in that they are trying to be seen as independent and self-reliant, whilst at the same time finding themselves having to operate in a market-based realm of tenders and contracts:

> *'They have come in the form of contractual service agreements which have been tightly controlled, competitive in nature and highly monitored. Indeed, some have argued that, through the contractualization of services provided by community, organizations have effectively become an "arm of government, albeit at arm's length"'* (Keevers, Trelaven and Sykes, 2008, p. 16, cited in Burkett, 2011, p.118).

The now arguably discarded Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government's 'Big Society' agenda has been theorised as linked to policies for reducing state expenditure on welfare provision and promoting an ideology of self-help which ideas such as ABCD could be co-opted to advance (Norman, 2012; Hilton & McKay, 2011;

Ishkanian & Szreter, 2012). The 'Big Society' provides an example of how community development may become part of a political project that has negative outcomes for many sections of a community. The report *Whose Society: the final big society audit* (2015) evaluates the outcomes of the policy against the governments stated aims and objectives and summarises:

> *'The conclusion of this report is that, despite some genuinely positive initiatives, the Big Society has failed to deliver against its original goals. Attempts to create more social action, to empower communities, and to open up public services, with some positive exceptions, have not worked. The Big Society has not reached those who need it most. We are more divided than before'* (Slocock, 2015, p.4).

The report highlights the key factors for the apparent failures of this policy as being linked to:

1. The continuing reliance upon a market-based public sector management model.
2. A lack of devolution of power to communities.
3. A lack of targeting of resources at the communities most in need.
4. Weakening of the voluntary sector, through market-based funding models.
5. Omitting the role that corporations and business should play in the community, a higher degree of corporate responsibility (Slocock, 2015).

Due to some of the theoretical and ideological similarities between ABCD and 'Big Society' the experiences and lessons learned from the report are of interest. For example, ABCD is not premised upon challenging the nature of the model of the market, but is interested in making markets work for communities. From the outcomes of the 'Big Society' initiative it would appear that without taking an approach which recognises the importance of power relationships, the role of corporations and business and, most fundamentally, a recognition of a redistribution of resources to communities most in need then similar initiatives will encounter the same issues, with similar results. However, on a positive side ABCD's commitment to empowering communities and the voluntary sector are in synchronisation with many of the recommendations of the report.

Community development, in whichever form it takes, is an inherently social project. It requires individuals within a community to combine and act collectively to achieve a set goal or outcome. This collective action is theorised to work in developing communities through drawing upon what has become known as social capital. The following section will explore what is meant by the term social capital and how it is theorised and utilised through ABCD.

3.7   Asset-Based Community Development and Social Capital

There are multiple forms and definitions of what constitutes a form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Porritt, 2007). However, generally capital can be defined through the following typology:

'***Natural Capital*** *is any stock or flow of energy and material that produces goods and services. It includes:*

- *Resources - renewable and non-renewable materials*
- *Sinks - that absorb, neutralise or recycle wastes*
- *Processes - such as climate regulation*

Natural capital is the basis not only of production but of life itself!

Human Capital *consists of people's health, knowledge, skills and motivation. All these things are needed for productive work.*

Enhancing human capital through education and training is central to a flourishing economy.

Social Capital *concerns the institutions that help us maintain and develop human capital in partnership with others; e.g. families, communities, businesses, trade unions, schools, and voluntary organisations.*

Manufactured Capital *comprises material goods or fixed assets which contribute to the production process rather than being the output itself – e.g. tools, machines and buildings.*

Financial Capital plays an important role in our economy, enabling the other types of Capital to be owned and traded. But unlike the other types, it has no real value itself but is representative of natural, human, social or manufactured capital; e.g. shares, bonds or banknotes' (Forum for the Future, 2015, np).

Theories of community and society have a long history of interest to philosophers and social scientists. The meanings and interactions of relationships and social relations upon society have been examined through the work of Emile Durkheim (1972) (social solidarity/anomie), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848) (class and the relations of production), Max Weber (1959) (authority and bureaucracy) and Ferdinand Tönnies (1955/1887) in his studies of community and society. Key concerns include the nature of social relations within society and generating a greater understanding of the nature of social order. Social capital theory moves beyond the concerns of the 'classical' theorists through seeking to highlight the links between micro level, and individual everyday experiences, with the meso or community/associational level (Putnam, 1993, 2000).

Through merging classical theory with contemporary ideas of social capital, the link between the micro/meso and macro (societal) levels can be examined in greater depth. However social capital is a complex and often fluid concept that remains highly contested: *'initial uses of the term have inevitably been rather perfunctory and even sloganistic in nature'* (Field, 2007, p.65).

ABCD draws heavily on the theory of utilising social capital to underpin community development. Although contested, social capital theory advances the idea that individuals develop a 'stock' of social capital through their relationships and networks. This capital can then be used to help negotiate society, through providing opportunities for gaining access to information and employment, building and strengthening networks and advancing social status. McKnight and Block (2012) expand upon the work of de Tocqueville in placing the building and nurturing of associations at the centre of community development. De Tocqueville reported on the operation of associations in America in 1831, proposing that the key to the success of America resided in the free associations established and maintained by the small groups of pioneers. For de Tocqueville it was precisely the free and voluntary

association of people in small communities that demonstrated the power of associational life to create progress and stability:

> *'...the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made... If men are to remain civilised, or are to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased'* (de Tocqueville, 1840, p.118).

Green and Haines highlight the relationship between social capital and assets:

> *'Participation in local organisations and associations builds social relationships and trust that are so essential in mobilizing community residents. Social capital becomes the basis for building other community assets, such as human and financial capital'* (Green and Haines, 2002 pp. 11-12).

However, associations may also be constructed or operated along the lines of exclusionary ideologies. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1988) argued that social capital functioned to reproduce inequality through the channels of education, culture and business networks being controlled, and was used by the 'elite' to maintain and transmit their social and economic status to their children. For Bourdieu, success or failure in the economic or social fields was not, as many classical economists and social theorists suggest, so much a matter of talent, aptitude and application as it was heavily influenced by an individual or group's measure of cultural capital. Bourdieu linked cultural capital to his theory of habitus. Habitus simply put is the embodiment of cultural capital: the skills, habits and dispositions that we acquire through our life experiences. 'Upper class' individuals may develop a taste for fine art because they have been exposed to an understanding of fine art through a process of cultural transmission and not because they have an innate knowledge of fine art that the supposed 'lower classes' cannot appreciate. Habitus, for example in the form of an appreciation and knowledge of fine art, can thus be translated into social capital necessary for advancing and maintaining status, position and economic gain.

Bourdieu studied the concept and operation of social status within the wider context of social hierarchy. For Bourdieu economic, cultural and social capitals were used in conjunction with each other to assist individuals and groups in ascending and

maintaining social hierarchical relations. When examined in this light social capital can be viewed as a means of creating and maintaining inequality, through the ability of certain groups to gain access and limit access for others to opportunities via channels such as education and social associations:

> *'different individuals obtain a very unequal return on a more or less equivalent capital according to the extent to which they are able to mobilise by proxy the capital of the group'* (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 2).

Bourdieu provides a counter to the arguably overly uncritical stance to the positive nature of social capital (Coleman, 1994; Putnam, 2000). However, it can be contested that he minimises the possibility that social capital can be used by the excluded as a means of coping and building resilience, as well as accessing opportunities for financial or social advancement. Emancipatory theorists such as Paulo Freire make the case that it is through building networks and solidarity that oppressed groups may challenge oppressive practice and inequality; such strategies require utilising social capital as a tool for resistance and change (Freire, 1972, 1985 & 2006).

Frances Fukuyama noted that social capital could be defined as exclusionary *'because group solidarity in human communities is often purchased at the price of hostility towards out-group members'* (Fukuyama, 2001, p.8). Social capital theory may reinforce the idea that individuals are in some way culpable for any misfortunes they encounter through neglecting to generate and maintain social networks that provide social capital. This notion omits the reality that structural inequality and social privilege exist and it is often the benefits of a good education, supportive family, a state of good health and general well-being and the security of a stable society that are the primary components of social capital (Bourdieu, 1999; Blackshaw, 2010).

Coleman (1994) linked social capital to rational choice theory and identified that social capital can be beneficial to all members of society, depending upon context and situation. For Coleman, social capital provided the bridge in the gap between economic and social theory, explaining why rational individual actors sometimes appear to act for the good of society rather than follow their own interests. He theorised that unlike economic, human or physical capital, social capital was a by-product of social society and a public rather than private 'good'. He saw individuals as rational actors, operating

on their own self-interests; they cooperate because it is in their interest to do so for a particular means or end. Unlike economic or cultural capital, social capital is a by-product of interactions that is not actively or deliberately pursued or created. However, through these individually motivated interactions all those involved in the interactions will benefit in some way, and thus social capital becomes a public or social good. The social/political scientist Robert Putnam (1993, 2000) appears to argue that social capital is at the same time a public and private good in that individuals acting upon their interests but in concert, through networks or associations, build and strengthen civic society and communities that benefit society.

Putnam (2000) claimed that social capital in America was declining due to people becoming less civically active and more individualistic. For Putnam, social capital constitutes the basis for participation and community health and resilience. Putnam's work gained the attention of lay and professional communities and is drawn upon by academics, community organisers and politicians. ABCD draws from the work of Putnam through aiming to build relationships and trust between people and harness social capital as a driver for community development. However, social capital is perhaps not as egalitarian a concept as Putnam et al. describe. At the extreme Putnam's theory has been critiqued as constituting an attack on state welfare and being politically aligned with neo-liberalism. Putnam's work has faced criticism for neglecting the 'dark side' of social capital: that it can be a source of social exclusion and used to maintain 'power', in addition to providing socially positive benefits (Portes & Landolt, 1996; Ball, 2003; Blackshaw & Long, 2005). Despite these critiques, Putnam's definition of social capital has gained the widest audience and has entered common usage in many areas of society, such as health and community development strategy and is used by major global institutions such as the World Bank:

> *'Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable collective action. Increasing evidence shows that social cohesion – social capital – is critical for poverty alleviation and sustainable human and economic development'* (World Bank, 2014).

Social capital, as advanced by social theory, appears limited through taking a normative approach that perceives individuals and families as somewhat homogenous. Indeed social capital theory has been critiqued as taking an overly functionalist view of

society and social processes. Tanasescu & Smart (2010) demonstrate the limits of social capital through their study of increasing levels of challenges in housing migrants in Canada. They argue that assertions that migrant communities have accessed social capital to assist them in meeting their housing needs appear no longer tenable:

> *'Given the widespread and complex global processes that have created the current housing and income disparities, the expectation that ethnocultural communities and informal assistance between friends and family members will buffer these impacts seems overly optimistic. Even if immigrants could be absorbed by family, friends, and community members, there are clear tensions and pressures that arise from these situations. The declining economic prospects of immigrants further reduce this sustaining capacity and the desirability of reliance on this mechanism as a buffer to homelessness'* (Tanasescu & Smart, 2010, p.115).

Community and social capital are perhaps better understood in the context of post-modernity as fluid or liquid concepts that people may choose to identify with, belong to or use at different times and in often complex or individualistic ways, not all of which are positive or communal (Bauman, 2000, 2006 & 2007). It may be argued that social capital theory further isolates those most excluded from society, such as the long-term street homeless, through the concept that individuals can use networks and relationships to mitigate or overcome structural inequalities such as poverty or ill health:

> *'Inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in society – in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age are responsible'* (Marmot, 2010 Executive Summary).

ABCD challenges the negative view of social capital through positioning the building, nurturing and deployment of community relationships and networks as the key component for unlocking individual and communal skills and attributes to create positive social change:

> *'While we all have deficiencies and problems, some of our neighbours get labelled by their deficiencies and problems... Their only real deficiency is the lack of connection to the rest of us. And our greatest community weakness is the fact*

that we haven't seen them and felt their loneliness' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.138).

It may be argued that McKnight and Block are overly simplifying the reality faced by those most socially excluded from society. For example, someone suffering from a severe mental health issues and living on the streets certainly faces some very real 'deficiencies and problems', and although making connections with the wider community may be beneficial, it appears clear that professional assistance with the problems they face is also a necessity. The language used describes deficiencies and problems in overly individualistic terms and omits the reality that such problems may have their roots in the structural and economic systems in which people live. How an individual interacts and negotiates these systems and the resources they have access to constitute important factors in the structure and agency discourse. It may be questioned what gifts and talents the wider community can expect a person in such conditions to contribute – perhaps the very act of raising this possibility with someone who is in extreme need could have negative consequences upon their mental health and sense of self and cause them distress and undue harm?

One may raise the issue that social capital theory and the definitions of what constitutes social capital and who is or is not able to access it is primarily constructed by academics, who by default have access to a high degree of social capital via their education and academic networks. It is a reasonable theory to suggest that someone experiencing a high degree of economic and social deprivation may hold a rather different view of social capital than providing a ladder up from the reality of their situation.

3.8   Asset-Based Community Development, Social Capital and Homelessness

Perhaps the homogenous nature underpinning many areas of social capital theory can be critiqued through examining the concept as it is understood and deployed by those most excluded from society. Policy related to dealing with the street homeless is often directed by the desire to remove people from the street and into 'mainstream' society.

To facilitate this end homeless people are often problematised and their informal networks of street homeless friends and acquaintances viewed as negative influences that may prohibit their return to 'mainstream' life (Seal, 2005, 2007). However, living on the streets requires a high level of resilience and knowledge and such groups are actually building and utilising a type of social capital unique to their situation as a means of overcoming or dealing with the issues they face.

Social capital is often cited as beneficial in finding employment, education and in reducing crime; for example, jobs and promotions are often viewed as evidence of links to wider social networks and this is seen as advantageous. In a similar vein, it could be argued that homeless people benefit from their particular form of social capital through finding a safe place to sleep, a place to get a meal or simply from the security of being part of a group of people with similar issues and concerns. Cattell (2001) & Lupton (2004) studied the positive impacts of informal networks and resource sharing among poor and disadvantaged communities and how such strategies formed and cemented coping and survival strategies. Perhaps social networks don't necessarily prevent people being homeless but can help people cope and reconnect? Social capital, as utilised by such groups as the homeless or dependant substance users, as an aid to coping or survival, is often perceived in negative terms or given little or no attention in theory or policy development.

Barker (2012a, 2012b) studied the link between youth homelessness, perceived negative behaviours and social/cultural capital. He concluded that the majority of homeless young people within the study had suffered some type of family breakdown. However, many of these young people maintained varying degrees of contact and relationships with their families and saw them as a source of support. The homeless young people engaged in what could be described as negative or anti-social behaviours, which were often unrelated to the acquisition of material possessions. For Barker the root of such behaviours lies in the rejection of these young people by wider society and a need to gain a sense of identity and agency, which is theorised as being constructed through embracing a stigmatised and marginalised status (Goffman, 1963). However, one may question why family relationships do not act as a buffer against such behaviours. Barker theorises that the relationships in themselves were insufficient to be gauged as consisting of positive social capital; to be of constructive

use and to constitute social capital, Barker proposed that the relationships required three components:

> '(1) contact with a group of people (or a person) considered family, (2) this family must have access to valued resources (such as to economic, cultural and/or social capital) and (3) have shared norms of trust and reciprocity' (Barker, 2012a, p.730).

Barker's research raises the issue that many homeless people will not have access to the three components and as such may be regarded as being excluded from the acquisition and use of social capital, except within the context of a negative way or means of symbolic resistance. As family breakdown constitutes one of the primary causes of homelessness, links between a lack of social capital and the frequency and length of homeless episodes in a person's biography suggest the need for further investigation, in particular for homeless organisations seeking to implement ABCD.

To summarise, on balance it could be argued that social capital may be of either positive or negative value to individuals and communities, dependent upon the context and form that it takes:

> 'Given certain conditions, social capital can be considered as an enabling resource that improves the effectiveness of other inputs in development. However, in the absence of those conditions, social capital may hinder development. Therefore, social capital both facilitates and constrains collective action' (Dhesi, 2000, p.201).

However, ABCD is more than a theory and despite some of the critiques raised around its theoretical underpinnings it now forms one of the key forms of development and service provision. The following provides an overview of ABCD in practice.

3.9 Asset-Based Community Development in Practice

Although ABCD may appear somewhat nebulous and difficult to define in terms of a single overarching theory, asset-based ways of working are being applied throughout a number of different areas, with community development, health and social care

arguably constituting the major environments (World Health Organisation, 1986, 2003, 2005; Broad & Russell, 2012). The methods and application of the theory may often differ within and between these areas, and one may be forgiven for thinking that ABCD may simply define the latest initiative being paid lip service to in regards of accessing government funding and meeting legislative or policy criteria. However, ABCD is based upon a set of definable principles that will be outlined.

The key components in putting ABCD into practice can be defined as:

- Positive Communication: the sharing of stories and of listening and being heard. Communication being developed as a tool for emancipatory change.

- Gift giving: everyone has something to contribute to their community and these things should be seen as gifts. It is the sharing of these gifts that helps to create a community relationship rather than a commercial or market-based exchange.

- Association and belonging: The building, maintaining and celebrating of associational life, in all its varied forms, from political groups, religious groups through to sporting associations or clubs and hobby societies.

- Compassion and hospitality: Communities must be inclusive and welcome and embrace the gifts and talents of 'outsiders' and those who may have been negatively labelled as 'deficient' or 'deviant' (McKnight & Block, 2012).

Mathie & Cunningham (2002) set out that:

> '*ABCD is an asset-based approach that uses methods to draw out strengths and successes in a community's shared history as its starting point for change (as in appreciative inquiry). Among all the assets that exist in the community, ABCD pays particular attention to the assets inherent in social relationships, as evident in formal and informal associations and networks (recognized in the research on social capital)*' (Mathie & Cunningham, 2002, pp. 3-4).

The recognition or drawing out of strengths and successes (assets) within individuals and communities is a common theme throughout asset-based initiatives. Such assets are discovered though processes such as appreciative inquiry and asset mapping for

example. The goal is to uncover the hidden or underutilised assets and then to establish a means of harnessing and combining these assets to create the means for positive change.

3.9.1   The Positive Conversation

ABCD begins from the position of establishing a positive conversation. This is not to say that issues and problems are ignored or rejected but that they are not the primary focus; establishing strengths and assets is the aim of ABCD and this is achieved through empowering the individual or community to set the agenda, rather than for professionals to identify problems and then propose/impose solutions.

The positive conversation is often linked to the theory of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI as a theory posits that positive change is founded and built upon recognising strengths and achievements rather than on needs and problems. AI evolved from a theory of managerial and organisational change and has been adapted to encompass many areas of community development. One of the key founders of AI, David Cooperrider, explains that:

> '*AI seeks, fundamentally, to build a constructive union between a whole people and the massive entirety of what people talk about as past and present capacities: achievements, assets, unexplored potentials, innovations, strengths, elevated thoughts, opportunities, benchmarks, high point moments, lived values, traditions, strategic competencies, stories, expressions of wisdom, insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul, and visions of valued and possible futures.*

> *Taking all of these together as a gestalt, AI deliberately, in everything it does, seeks to work from accounts of this "positive change core"—and it assumes that every living system has many untapped and rich and inspiring accounts of the positive*' (Cooperrider & Whitney, nd p.3).

Cooperrider and Srivastva critique forms of emancipatory research, such as Action Research, as failing to achieve their potential *'because of [their] romance with critique at the expense of appreciation'* (Ludema et al, 2006 p. 157). This view complements the perspective of ABCD, which is that *'a community is built through the stories we tell and what we choose to talk about – our narrative. The stories of a competent*

community are a narrative about our talents, properties and gifts' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.95). It is through investigating and nurturing the positive narrative that the next step of exploring and creating an inventory of a communities strengths and gifts may proceed; this process is often referred to as 'asset mapping'. However, I would argue that if Cooperrider and Srivastva's critique is accepted there is the real danger that positive narratives are nurtured at the expense of highlighting and challenging very real forms of structural discrimination and oppression. To expand upon this point, many of the homeless people I have worked with have experienced horrific forms of trauma and structural discrimination and it is only through naming and exploring these oppressive forces that they can begin to make a new form of sense of their experiences and gain in strength to resist and struggle to fight their way back as people who have a story that needs to be heard and a place to belong within society. To focus primarily upon strengths and positives would therefore represent a further injustice against homeless people who have been oppressed.

3.9.2   Asset Mapping

Asset mapping is the process by which a community's or individual's strengths and resources are explored and made visible. The map takes the form of an in-depth survey with the goal of making known what and where the various assets are with a view to establishing links and networks between them. Dorfman (1998) provides a definition of what mapping should entail:

> *'Mapping: To make a map of; to show or establish the features or details of, with clarity, like that of a map; to make a survey of, or travel over for, as if for the purpose of making a map'* (Dorfman, 1998, p.iii).

Asset mapping may be understood as a counter strategy to undertaking a needs-based analysis. Rather than asking an individual or community about their needs and problems and seeking a solution or remedy for these, an asset mapping exercise starts from the position of what strengths and positive factors are already available to this person, group or community. Green & Haines (2002) link asset mapping to the idea of developing markets, seeing opportunities to discover and nurturing undervalued assets in a community.

Asset mapping is more than simply making an inventory of the economic, cultural and social assets of individuals and communities. The assets of individuals within the community are often referred to as gifts, emphasising the concept of the reciprocal exchange of gifts which may take the form of an exchange of time or skills rather than any material asset (Cahn, 2011). It is the idea of these 'non-profit' related assets which underpins the building of community relations. The mapping process seeks to formulate and strengthen links and bonds within the community to ensure that the assets present are utilised to their maximum capacity for the benefit of that community. Once the mapping exercise has been accomplished the community will, theoretically, be better placed to make plans to access and leverage assets from beyond the community, such as professional services, etc.

3.9.3   Community as Association

Community as association or a group of associations may be considered as being comprised of a group of citizens working together; associations are amplifiers of the gifts, talents, and skills of individual community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1999). The association of members of the community, in a myriad of roles and contexts, is theorised to demonstrate that a community is healthy, resilient and abundant in gifts. Associational life, as opposed to an individual life framed by consumerism, represents the ideal form of community within the theory of ABCD. Recognising and understanding the function and power of associations and associational life is an inherent feature of ABCD:

> '*The association is the tool that allows us to produce the future we envision... In association we are not consumers, we are not clients. We are citizens with gifts and the power to make powerful communities*' (McKnight & Block, 2012, p.126)

Associational life is about the power to get things done as a community, not to wait for an outside professional to decide what needs to be done. As associations gain in numbers and membership, they gain in strength for creating community change. For McKnight and Block (2012) it is in the act of association that citizenship takes shape and becomes possible.

In support of the idea of the importance of American associational life in community development, Kretzmann & McKnight (nd) studied associational life in Grand

Boulevard, a low income neighbourhood on Chicago's South Side. This area had suffered serious economic decline in the mid 1980s and had experienced unemployment levels of up to 34%. Nevertheless, the report concluded that associational life in the area was vibrant and that with encouragement and organisation more could be done to assist the community to develop through associational efforts.

Communities, such as the one studied in Chicago, are argued to demonstrate the inclusivity of ABCD. Low income or inner-city communities that have experienced the effects of economic and social depression are often described in disparaging terms and their residents perceived as defeated and dejected. ABCD as theorised by Kretzmann and McKnight challenges these views and theorises that communities such as these will hold a store of untapped assets that can be released through organising and mobilising community associations.

The following section will examine the development and impact of *The Big Issue*, a magazine sold by homeless people in Britain as a means of self-help. It will question whether this project is asset-based and if so whether it demonstrates an effective means of advancing community organisation.

3.10   The Big Issue*: Case Study in ABCD?*

> *'…it sets out to propel people back from the edge into mainstream society. But not simply a job creation scheme, it was about self-esteem, people winning control over their lives, self-help, breaking dependencies and sustainability'* (Swithinbank, 2001, xiii).

In March 1991, John Bird and Gordon Riddick collaborated on a project to develop a social enterprise to assist homeless people by providing opportunities for training, employment and positive lifestyle change. The vehicle they chose for this enterprise was to become known as *The Big Issue* magazine. The idea of a newspaper produced to assist and be sold by homeless people was not a new one, similar schemes had been operating in America for a period of time; however, the content and the recognition that the magazine attracted over time has surpassed previous projects.

Bird had experienced poverty and homelessness first hand and he believed that unconditional welfare and charity were in part to blame as they enabled the situation people experienced to continue and sapped their drive and ambition:

> *'I have stood against the growing use of benefits that stop people building a life for themselves. Why is it that the amount of people who are on benefit who get to our top colleges is less than 1%? How is it that many of the children whose families are trapped on benefit do poorly at school?*

> *Why? Because benefit does not help them. It is dressed up to look like a social support system but is in fact like a big brick wall built around people who desperately need support to get out of poverty'* (Bird, 2014, np).

Bird, in common with ABCD founder McKnight, believed that people's skills, talents and resilience needed to be appreciated and utilised to allow them to work towards their own positive development: '*The first step is to start from where you are, to clean up your own backyard. It's like I said: you have start with improving yourself*' (Bird, 2013). Bird concurs with the view that welfare and professional interventions can be disempowering. With this in mind *The Big Issue* was established, not as charity, but on the principles of a social enterprise styled business. The model required the homeless vendors to purchase the magazine and then sell it on the streets at a 50% profit. The profits would be kept by the vendor to purchase further magazines or provide a legally earned income, but *The Big Issue* was not established as purely an economic vehicle. The founders theorised that though providing the opportunity for homeless people to interact with the public, not in the vein of charity cases or beggars, but as entrepreneurs selling a quality product they would gain in confidence and communication skills and become re-engaged in society through developing positive social networks. Homeless people would be economically active within their own communities and members of their community would, through supporting the magazine, be supporting positive changes for homeless people within their community. The idea of the vital nature of social networks and a positive sense of self and place within a community features heavily in social capital theory and ABCD.

John Bird has become something of a celebrity since the success of *The Big Issue* and is often called upon to give his critique of welfare or social issues in the UK. His

uncompromising stance on the negative impact that benefits have upon people and society and his support for self-help initiatives resonates with government policy such as the 'Big Society' and encompasses many of the facets of ABCD.

The Big Issue has been in operation for nearly twenty-five years and has expanded from its beginnings as a London-based initiative to encompass many cities and towns throughout the UK. While it has assisted in helping many homeless people regain a sense of purpose and reconnect with society there are possible negative impacts from the scheme. One possible critique of *The Big Issue* is that many people who buy the magazine do so out of feelings of pity or empathy for the vendors rather than seeing it as undertaking a genuine purchase. Media reports, confirmed by Bird, highlight the fact that *The Big Issue* is now being sold by many people who are not homeless and by migrant workers who use it as a means to claim work related benefits. While this shows initiative and is an economically rational choice for the vendor, it was not the purpose that the magazine was originally intended for. *The Big Issue* may also extend the divide between those who are homeless and seen as deserving (e.g. those willing, or able, to sell the magazine) and those who beg or survive on charity. The initial rationale of *The Big Issue* as being a short-term intervention that would allow homeless people to re-engage with the regular labour market has also been called into question as a large number of vendors are thought to continue to sell the magazine over a longer period of time than was originally envisaged.

Initiatives such as *The Big Issue* have made a positive impact upon the lives of some homeless people (Swithinbank, 1997). However, it can be argued that such initiatives problematise homelessness as an individual issue that people should strive to work their way out of, and may detract attention from the wider structural issues of poverty, unemployment, mental and physical health issues and a lack of affordable accommodation. Perhaps most glaringly homelessness within the UK, and in particular London, is increasing (Fitzpatrick et al, 2015). While projects such as *The Big Issue*, and other asset-based initiatives may act as a palliative for a minority of those facing such issues, it appears apparent that they do not provide the resources to address the scale of the issues, and may unwittingly mask and divert attention away through providing positive narratives and individual success stories.

3.11   Asset-Based Community Development: Coherent Theory?

ABCD appears to offer a positive theory for change that has become accepted and is now a part of mainstream thinking in many areas of health, social care and community development. It has arguably become synonymous with participatory models of community development, and has been depicted as creating the space for emancipatory community change, through offering a credible alternative to professional and top-down systems of development and management. However, it has also been critiqued as a sound-bite concept, often deployed in a multitude of different ways, dependent upon the circumstance and audience.

It is difficult to identify a single theory or conceptual basis for the asset-based community development approach. Asset-based development is more a method than it is a theory of community social change (Green & Haines, 2002, p.11). Green and Haines suggest that ABCD is a way of *doing* community development rather than a proscriptive theoretical approach. On reflection there may not be one consistent theory and application of ABCD, or even asset-based working: there are 'guidelines' as to what underpins asset-based approaches, but are they consistent enough to formulate a coherent means of practice? How should asset-based approaches be moderated, and does the increase in homelessness in London demonstrate a failure of *The Big Issue* to find a workable asset-based approach to reducing street homelessness? Or are the individual success stories and opportunities for change and development paramount? Have asset-based approaches reduced the overall spending rates on health within the NHS or made communities quantifiably healthier?

ABCD may also be critiqued as an ephemeral concept that is heavy on rhetoric yet offers little that is radically different to other forms of community development. ABCD may be understood not in terms of a 'theory', but more in terms of an approach or method geared to changing how individuals, communities and services interact together:

> *'An Assets Alliance might not be a "thing" so much as a campaign to change and achieve a cultural shift - we don't need a new organisation or a new structure'* (Assets Alliance Scotland, 2010, p.5).

Anthony Morgan, Associate Director for Public Health Excellence National Institute for Clinical Excellence, proposed that ABCD: '*is not a new concept … but a framework for bringing existing concepts and ideas together in a systematic way*' (Morgan, 2012, p. 18).

It would appear that many of the benefits and successes of asset-based approaches are difficult to quantify; as Friedli, citing Marmot, argues:

> '*taking an asset-based approach at a local level fosters greater local confidence and self-esteem for people and communities… although evidence to this effect is entirely anecdotal'* (Friedli, 2012, p.3).

Although there is currently a shortage of empirical evidence to demonstrate the success of asset-based approaches there has been a generally positive reaction to the future possibilities presented by such initiatives:

> '*Nevertheless, lack of evidence has not prevented advocates from stating that "it is justified to be very optimistic about the potential of the asset-based approach"'* (Hills, Carroll & Desjardins 2010, p. 97).

3.12   Development: a Freirean Approach

As has been discussed, ABCD is primarily couched in terms of developing forms of self-help within communities. This is problematic in that it fails to analyse the key forms of oppression and inequality that reside at the local and the global level. Such omissions ensure that the status quo remains unchallenged and that the causes of poverty and social issues are positioned firmly at the feet of marginalised individuals and communities. However, there is a rich history of community development that draws from the work of Paulo Freire which can be used to challenge such processes and ensure that community development fulfils its radical emancipatory promise.

A Freirean approach to community development is centred on the theory of critical pedagogy, a belief in the power and goodness of people and a commitment to liberation from oppression:

'Critical Pedagogy involves questioning, naming, reflecting, analyzing and collectively acting in the world". It is also defined as a, "democratic process of education that takes place in community groups and forms the basis of transformation' (Ledwith, 2005, p.95).

In contrast to the weakly defined nature of ABCD theory, a Freirean approach to community development provides a deep theoretical base from which to develop practice. The process of critical pedagogy or popular education is cyclical and demands that equal attention is paid to thought and action. To simplify the process the following steps would form the basis of community development:

1. People are subjects and not objects. Everyone is able and has the right to think for themselves, and to be heard and respected. With this in mind, people can think critically and act upon their world and make changes. This view challenges the dominant neo-liberal view which objectifies the large groups of people (such as the homeless, unemployed, etc) and classifies them as 'failures', 'the underclass', 'lazy and feckless' and many other negative descriptors that are used to dehumanise and control.

2. Through group conversations and storytelling internalised ideas, often false and used to create subordination, can be discovered and challenged. This is the process of raising critical consciousness. *'The simple act of discovering some control over life's circumstances is empowering, energising and brings with it a sense of self-belief. It restores dignity. It also comes with a sense of identity affirming who we are'* (Ledwith, 2016, p.43-44).

3. The process of action and reflection is paramount in Freirean community development. Theory cannot be abstract but must resonate and come from people's lived experience. It must be linked to the political and social conditions of the time and place, and theory is understood as the means for contextualising and informing action. *'Freire always said that the struggle belongs to us all, that we all have both a right and a duty to transform society into a better place, and that his contribution is not a blueprint but a strategy based on his own experience for us to adapt to our current cultural and political contexts'* (Ledwith, 2016, p.91). Freire saw thoughtless action or pure activism as uninformed and potentially harmful to the future process of liberation and

social change. Critical reflection leads to informed action and drives social change.

Freirean theory constitutes a holistic process for generating libratory theory and practice or praxis. The theory must be applied within the context and the realities of the lives of people within the community. However, in opposition to ABCD this form of development is clearly underpinned by theoretical rigour and one must be aware that it must be embraced in its totality as to pick and choose from key ideas is incompatible with practicing Freirean community development.

3.13 Reflections

This chapter has explored the development and operation of ABCD and has highlighted the chimerical nature of the theory; ABCD appears to be at once a theory of community and solidarity while arguably simultaneously reducing social issues to individual- and community-based problems requiring individual- and community-based solutions. ABCD appears to be a theory that can be appropriated by all and practiced in ways that may be diametrically opposed to people practising it from different ideological standpoints. For example, homelessness as a structural issue requires challenging economic and social systems that produce and reproduce inequality and division. An ABCD project which seeks to deal with homelessness within a single community may be successful at reducing levels of homelessness and creating a greater sense of inclusion within the community; however, it may also have a negative impact upon reducing homelessness at a national and international level through explicitly citing the problem as a local concern. In this way a project explicitly established to benefit a homeless group may have negative consequences for the wider homeless community and reduce the impact of campaigns placing homelessness as a large scale social issue exacerbated by neo-liberal social and economic policy.

Social capital has become a meta-theory in the way it has been appropriated to explain the roots and causes of many social issues and demonstrate that solutions to such ills are to be found through growing and strengthening communities and networks. This theory often downplays the impact that neo-liberal ideology has had upon the very communities that are now tasked with providing the solutions. Asset-based initiatives

in cities such as Chicago may positively benefit a section of the community; however, they appear to do little to challenge the processes of deindustrialisation or neo-liberal economics that arguably created the issues facing such communities. A society predicated upon competition, consumerism and the promise of free-market values has little time for forming genuine bonds of solidarity that are a necessary component for creating healthy and engaged communities. Dependency is often described in negative terms under the theory of ABCD, and while some forms of institutional dependency may negatively inhibit or impact upon individuals and communities, the use of a blanket categorisation does run the risk of ignoring the fact that each and every person is dependent upon others throughout their lives, to a greater or lesser extent. It may be counterproductive and damaging to label people suffering from economic or health related misfortunes using a negative concept of dependency, regardless of the means of care being provided.

Marginalised groups such as the homeless, the unemployed or asylum seekers are demonised and perceived as people who have an individual responsibility for their problems. Such depictions of some of society's weakest members have become almost hegemonic and arguably theories such as ABCD may have to adapt and challenge the macro level processes that continue to generate such images and the levels of inequality that are an implicit part of the social ills they seek to address. Unlike ABCD, Freirean community development theory delivers the conceptual and theoretical tools for analysing and challenging such forms of oppression: ABCD's lack of position on this raises the question of whether ABCD stands in opposition to Freirean ideas of social change or whether it has been subsumed under the political and social hegemony of the process of neo-liberalism and as such is a theory unsuited to analyse oppression and seek structural change.

The next chapter will outline the ontological, epistemological and theoretical perspectives underpinning my research, and describe the methodology and methods used to undertake the study. The work of some of the key figures who have influenced my thinking will be discussed. A reflective account of the complexities and struggles I encountered in the role of researcher/volunteer will be recounted to provide an authentic account of the research process.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND METHDOLOGY

In this chapter I will begin by restating the research aims and objectives and then proceed to examine my epistemological and ontological standpoints and describe and discuss the theoretical perspectives underpinning my research. I will continue by describing the methodology and methods used. A reflective account of the research process will conclude the chapter.

4.1   Research Overview

The aims and objectives of the research were constructed to allow a wide ranging exploration of the contexts and intersections of ABCD, homelessness and the experiences of homeless people and those who volunteer to support them. As a foundation for the research, a one-day participatory training session for staff, volunteers and homeless people involved with HtH was arranged and co-facilitated by myself and an ABCD practitioner. The aim of the training was to provide participants with an overview of ABCD theory and concepts and offer an environment for all involved with HtH to have the opportunity to discuss how ABCD could be implemented. Fourteen members of HtH (one member of staff, three board members and ten volunteers) and six previous/current service users attended the training. Feedback was gained at the end of the session and the research continued to question, through interviews, how the participants understood and utilised the information they gained from the training, as well as whether it affected any change in working practice. The training session was also used to engage the people who attended in a discussion around developing the research aims and objectives, and their responses and suggestions were incorporated in the aims and objectives listed below.

Aims

1. To explore the benefits of, and challenges involved in, using ABCD as a method of facilitating increased involvement of homeless service users in a food distribution project.
2. To investigate the wider applicability of the ABCD based model as a means of enhancing service user involvement of homeless people.

3. To critically examine the theoretical assumptions underpinning ABCD and detail how they impact upon ABCD in practice.

Objectives

1. To increase understanding of ABCD as a strategy for facilitating homeless service user involvement.
2. To develop a detailed understanding of the experience and perceptions of homeless service users regarding the implementation of an ABCD approach.
3. To examine the perceptions of employed and voluntary project staff in relation to ABCD.
4. To examine the impact of ABCD on homeless service users and voluntary staff at the level of the micro (personal interactions), meso (organisational norms and operations) and the macro (interactions with the wider community and other statutory/third sector organisations).
5. To increase understanding of the barriers and challenges for homeless people to participate actively as service users.

The research focussed on how ABCD is understood and its impact upon a small group of volunteers and homeless service users at HtH (Aim 1; Objectives 2/3/5). In addition the research examined the shifting dynamics of power within the organisation and analysed whether ABCD-based working has a sustainable impact for increasing and maintaining user involvement. The impact of user involvement upon homeless people was examined through the lens of Freirean theory (Aim 2; Objectives 1/2).

As ABCD theory draws heavily upon social capital as a component for development and change, the research provided the opportunity to analyse the effectiveness of ABCD when deployed by a group with limited, and arguably negatively conceptualised, social capital (Objectives 3/5) (Putnam & Lewis, 2003). To move beyond the experiences of volunteers and homeless people at HtH, some brief supplementary interviews with Chorley Borough Council Homeless Department and other local voluntary agencies involved with HtH were undertaken to examine the impacts of implementing ABCD upon inter-agency working and relations (Objective 4).

4.2   *Epistemology and Ontology*

4.2.1   *Overview: Social Constructionism*

My experiences of working in the environment of homelessness have led me to define my epistemology as social constructionist. The term 'constructionism', particularly 'social constructionism' derives largely from the work of Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) and from Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1972). Social constructionism theorises that human beings construct meanings through interactions with the world and the objects within it (Heidegger, 2010). The meanings ascribed to objects emerge from interactions and relations; thus meanings are both objective and subjective in nature. Knowledge is created through the medium of dialogue which is interpreted to create meaning, and such meanings are in turn open to interpretation. Interpretation is context sensitive, in that it is linked to a set of circumstances and time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through continuing dialogue deeper meanings, though not common laws or global truths can be uncovered (Berger & Luckmann, 1972). A counter argument could be couched in terms of an assertion that observable truths exist. However, Moshman (2015) cites the example of the often fluid nature of long-held truths. He highlights the case of the number of planets in our universe: the answer of nine would have been classified as an objective truth in 2006; however, this answer would not have been 'true' in 2007. The reason being that the planet Pluto was declassified as constituting a 'true' planet; the material composure of the universe did not change, but the human definition of Pluto constituting a planet altered. For Moshman, this demonstrates that 'facts' are open to change, and that commonly held truths are contingent upon human interpretation and construction; the views of human agents acting in and on social structures shape these structures. As these views change, so can the shape and meaning of social structures.

A major question for me is whether homelessness is a concept that can be understood and 'managed' separately from the person experiencing it. Therefore my epistemological position is influenced by social constructionism: through a belief that '*there are multiple realities, being socio-psychological constructions forming an interconnected whole'* (Maykut & Morehouse, 1984 cited in Wilson, 2000 p.205). Owen proposes:

> '*the claim and viewpoint that the content of our consciousness, and the mode of relating we have to others, is taught by our culture and society; all the metaphysical quantities we take for granted are learned from others around us*' (Owen, 1992, p. 386).

Wilson (2000) argues that medical science sees illness as a phenomenon that can be understood and treated as exterior to a person. However, Conrad & Barker contend that there is a case to view illness as a social construction:

> '*some illnesses are particularly embedded with cultural meaning—which is not directly derived from the nature of the condition—that shapes how society responds to those afflicted and influences the experience of that illness. Second, all illnesses are socially constructed at the experiential level, based on how individuals come to understand and live with their illness. Third, medical knowledge about illness and disease is not necessarily given by nature but is constructed and developed by claims-makers and interested parties*' (Conrad & Barker, 2010 p.67).

The rational development of this sequence of argument leads me to question the concept of homelessness as a 'thing' independent of the person that can, like illness , be eased or removed by a set of predetermined interventions. Understanding homelessness requires taking an interpretive standpoint, as discussed in previous chapters; homelessness as a social construction requires '*that the lived experiences of others be grasped through the apprehension of their inner meaning; the meaning that led to their production*' (Hughes, 1990, p. 90). It is arguable that the method of establishing a person's status as homeless, and therefore his/her eligibility to receive assistance, is based on an objectivist perspective: that the homeless officer can remain unbiased and suspend their values and ascertain the 'true' status of the person being interviewed through their objective methods. However, through my interactions with housing officers, homelessness workers and volunteers I have experienced the subjective responses given to people identifying themselves as homeless: "*He is trying it on, no-one sleeping rough a couple of days could be clean like that*" (excerpt from a volunteer interview at HtH, 2014). Social constructionism disputes views that are commonly held to describe the 'truth'. Such views are often formed through exposure to a dominant ideology or meta-narrative. Individuals and minority groups may find

their voices and experiences constrained and denied by the dominant narrative that arguably tends to pathologise those who are considered inferior.

However, despite the possibility that homelessness is a social construction it is also a 'reality' for the person experiencing it and it can be, although arguably partially, examined and categorised as a social phenomenon. This position necessitates employing a level of objectivity into the study of homelessness; denying the reality of the experience upon a homeless person and that homelessness, as a general phenomenon, has negative impacts upon the majority of those experiencing it appears an unsustainable position. Knowledge and beliefs are generated and largely governed through cultural and social norms and are historically situated, and as such are 'real' in their effects (Mills, 1973). Therefore, my ontological position incorporates a realist position: while there is a real world, there are different, perspectives on reality/realities (Maxwell, 2012). Crotty (2009, p.11) argues that '*realism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible*.' To return to the earlier example, if humans were no longer around to discuss whether Pluto was or was not a planet, the object named as Pluto would still exist. However the meanings of planet and Pluto would not exist, and as such the world of meaning, without a mind is inconceivable (Crotty, 2009, p.11).

4.2.2   Social Constructionism and Power

Social constructionism encompasses a wide range of viewpoints and understandings. Danzigger (1997) theorises that the contrasting viewpoints can be described as taking the position of 'light' and 'dark'. The light interpretation is described as being more hopeful and based upon the notion that people construct themselves and each other during interactions and dialogue, as opposed to the dark view that people are restrained and constructed (at least partially and often unknowingly) by social forces. Burr (2003) contends that the labels of light and dark may be misleading and that the definitions micro and macro social constructionism may provide a more useful description. Micro level is experienced through the everyday discourse of people and the myriad of meanings and outcomes inherent within interactions and dialogue. The work of Gergen (1991, 2009) may be defined through the description of a micro level social constructionist. Gergen's work includes the use of the concept of 'dialogue' and how this can be used to understand and resolve conflict. The operation and structure

of power is not the primary concern for micro social constructionism; for Gergen (1989), power is an effect of discourse and a means to be heard rather than a force for oppression.

Macro level social constructionism places power at the centre of the analysis. Whilst the constructive power of language and discourse is acknowledged the operation of social processes, relations and institutional norms, values and practices is considered to have a (varying level) of impact upon the construction of knowledge, dialogue and language (Bourdieu, 1984; Bauman, 2000; Freire, 2006). Since the macro level maintains a specific focus upon power it is often used to analyse and challenge forms of social inequality, such as gender, race, class, disability or sexuality. However, it is possible, and arguably advantageous, from a research perspective to synthesise the micro and macro approaches within the methodology. In the case of researching with homeless people such a synthesis will assist in accessing rich narrative accounts from homeless people and those who work with them and link them to larger macro level issues of concern, such as power and exclusion. Such an approach assists in reducing the possibility for the research to become a negative critique of homeless services and theories for change by providing a possible counter view, demonstrating individual and group strengths and successes and identifying possible opportunities for positive change.

Power is often perceived to reside primarily within large governmental institutions, corporations or be the provision of the wealthiest families and individuals in society. This view of power may be described as reductionist and may mask the diffuse operation of power (Lukes, 2005). Some individuals and groups may act against oppression through forms of resistance. Debate continues as to whether such forms of resistance are constrained by norms and forms of social control, or cultivated and controlled as a means of managing dissent (Chomsky, 2008). However, the point remains that such acts of resistance demonstrate, or at least suggest, a level of agency at work and the (re?)deployment of power for a constructive or emancipatory, rather than repressive purpose.

My research engages with power in a multiplicity of situations and relationships: the power relations between homeless people and services; between and amongst those operating the services at a statutory and voluntary level; and the power differentials

inherent within my position as a researcher and those of the people I am involved in the research with. Foucault (1995) argues that conceptions of power should be examined through the day to day interactions between people and institutions. Foucault's early analysis of institutional power relations within penal settings highlighted the increasing phenomenon of self-surveillance, and suggests that social settings such as schools, work and hospitals operate as sites for maintaining surveillance and social control. This theory provides the theoretical means to examine the application of power in the complex and unsettled environment of a homelessness organisation, where systems of control and surveillance are routine features. Lyon-Callo reported the views of staff at a homeless hostel:

> '*they appeared to be suggesting that surveillance was a key tool for uncovering "causes" of homelessness that need to be treated if we hoped to decrease homelessness*' (Lyon-Callo, 2000, p.328).

Foucault theorised that the human body is at the centre of the nexus of social control and power. However, Bordo argues that:

> '*the human body is itself a politically inscribed entity, its physiology and morphology shaped by histories and practices of containment and control*' (Bordo, 1993, p.21).

This discourse can be useful in illuminating the concept of the 'medicalisation of homelessness' that arguably remains tacit and largely unchallenged:

> '*Medicalization treats housing deprivation as a symptom of personal pathologies that must be cured by experts.... Thus, the medicalization of housing insecurity or deprivation opens a ground for the intervention of disciplinary techniques*' (Willse, 2010, p. 165).

The homeless 'condition' is thus socially constructed along medicalised lines and homelessness pathologised. The homeless body becomes a site for treatment, and surveillance and control are deemed as necessary measures to 'treat' the condition of homelessness. Foucault's continuing exploration of power led him to define power in terms of it being non-hierarchical and diffuse and present in all human relationships. However, patterns of domination are prevalent in society; for example the power to

punish is legally restricted to the state and underpinned by specialist knowledge, such as criminology, used to define criminality, or medical knowledge to define illness or disease.

This research examines power through undertaking a critical analysis of how HtH operates and manages multiple, competing, and sometimes conflicting interests of those serving and served by the organisation, while remaining mindful that homeless people have agency and may react to and deploy power to achieve their aims or resist oppressive practices. However, it is contestable that the balance of power remains held by the institution and forms of resistance may be filtered and dissipated through official channels and procedures (Robson, Begum & Lock, 2003; Seal, 2007).

4.3   Theoretical Perspectives

4.3.1   Overview: Critical Theory

As a researcher working in an area concerned with issues of power, agency and equity, I am undertaking my analysis of a homelessness organisation and the implementation of ABCD through the lens of Critical Theory (Fromm, 1985; Gramsci, 1971; Adorno, 1991; Habermas, 2005). Geuss (1981, p.2) defines critical theory as resting upon three propositions:

1. *Critical theories have a special standing as guides for human action in that:*
   a) *They are aimed at producing enlightenment in the agents who hold them, i.e. at enabling those agents to determine what their true interest are;*
   b) *They are inherently emancipatory, i.e. they are free agents from a kind of coercion which is at least partially self-imposed, from self frustration of conscious human action.*
2. *Critical theories have a cognitive content; i.e. they are forms of knowledge.*
3. *Critical theories differ epistemologically in essential ways from theories in natural sciences. Theories in natural sciences are 'objectifying'; critical theories are 'reflective'.*

A critical theory, then, is a reflective theory which gives agents a kind of knowledge inherently productive of enlightenment and emancipation (Geuss, 1981, p.2).

Critical theory developed from what became known as the Frankfurt School (Kellner, 2007). The Frankfurt School instigated a critical analysis of mass communication and culture drawing inspiration from the theories of Marx. They analysed the impact that consumerism and popular culture had upon stabilising capitalist society and suppressing dissent, and sought new models for political change and emancipation. Critical theory may be conceptualised through the classical theories of, for example: Horkheimer & Adorno (2002), Marcuse (1969) and Fromm (1985, 2002). However, contemporary critical theory has broadened to, arguably, encompass aspects of post-modernism, post-structuralism and feminist theory through the works of Bourdieu (1984), Foucault (1995) and Benhabib (2002), et al. Critical theory recognises the relationship between people and society; it accepts that while society influences human nature, humans construct and can alter society through their actions.

Critical theory argues that people need to understand their own situatedness, historical, cultural and social, before emancipatory change can become a process. To draw from the ideas of Gramsci (1971), people need to understand that they are unfree before they can move towards freedom. Critical theory, in particular the 'classical' theory of the Frankfurt School, has been critiqued as offering an appraisal of society without providing actions for change:

'*While critical theorists appear to support action, they tend to remain at the level of rhetoric: their theorising is limited to propositional statements rather than being embodied in their own practices as they engage with changing social situations*' (McNiff, 2013, p.50).

Whilst this critique is grounded, it is arguable that contemporary critical theory has developed and embodies theories wedded to the principles of praxis. Critical theory should not see itself as an end point, but as a process of constant reflection and action leading to praxis (Freire, 2006). I support the concept of theory and action as indivisible for achieving emancipatory change and thus my understanding and application of critical theory is influenced by the work of Gramsci (1971) and Paulo

Freire (2006). Carr and Kemmis (1986) argue that praxis is not simply action based upon reflection, but that it embodies certain qualities including a commitment to human well-being, respect for other and a search for truth. Praxis is the action of people who are free and able to act for themselves. I am uncomfortable with praxis being defined as a search for 'truth', as the notion of 'truth' is subjective. Furthermore, I concur that oppression limits freedom and consciousness; however, I reject the notion that those experiencing oppression cannot demonstrate praxis, as it is arguable that the majority of our social actions are constrained and that acting in solidarity to develop positive change could ultimately be valued as the highest form of praxis.

For Freire praxis is a dialogical process, it is creative and can only occur in communion with other people. To facilitate options for understanding and change people must be aware of their own cultural and historical situatedness and develop a critique of the multiple forms of oppression operating within society. An understanding of the concept of hegemony is crucial to develop a greater awareness of oppression.

4.3.2   Hegemony

Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937) was a leading Italian Marxist. He provided a visionary means of reinterpreting key areas of Marxist thought. He was an intellectual, a journalist and a major theorist who spent his last eleven years incarcerated in prison under the Fascist Mussolini regime. Gramsci contributed new conceptualisations for the understanding of power and hegemony, and the role of the intellectual and education in the struggle for emancipatory change. In common with Paulo Freire, Gramsci's theories are developed as a means for achieving action and change: theory as the basis for constructive action. Gramsci's concepts of ideological hegemony and the role of the academic in promoting praxis inform my theoretical perspective.

Gramsci developed the theory of hegemony from earlier conceptualisations drawn from the Russian Revolution, and particularly the thoughts of Lenin. Gramsci theorised that hegemony comprised:

> '*the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules*' (Gramsci, 1971, p.244).

Hegemony may be understood as an organising system through which the dominant ideas of the status quo, including values, attitudes, beliefs and morals, are diffused into everyday life and internalised as common sense notions. Gramsci challenged the orthodox Marxist conceptualisation of power as a primarily one-sided notion of a ruling class dominating by the means of force and coercion. Gramsci accepted that the state employed power, through the means of the armed forces, police, judicial systems and economic measures; however, he theorised that this use of power was secondary to the primary means of ruling through consent: the *'apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively'* (Gramsci, 2012, p.12). For Gramsci, coercive forms of direct domination such as the use of force reside in the political realm, and are employed as a means combating dissent should 'manufactured' consent break down. Manufactured consent is created through civil society. Cohen & Arato define civil society as:

> *'... a sphere of social interaction between economy and the state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements and forms of public communication. Modern civil society is created through forms of self-constitution and self-mobilization. It is institutionalised and generalised through laws, and especially subjective rights, that stabilize social differentialisation... both independent action and institutionalisation are necessary for the reproduction of civil society'* (Cohen & Arato, 1992, p. ix).

Consent is manufactured and maintained through social and cultural processes; educational systems, the press and religion are seen as mediums through which hegemonic values are channelled and create certain modes of behaviour and expectations within people (Gramsci, 1971, 2012). The traditional expectations of the role of an adult male, for example, as being capable, independent and able to provide are not seen as compatible with homelessness and thus the status of the homeless male is negated. It could be argued that homelessness can be examined as a complex process of hegemony; regardless of how powerful or convincing the counter narrative, the ideology of homelessness, as a product of individual failure and deviance appears to demonstrate the continuing production and transmission of an ideological form of hegemony.

4.3.3   The Role of the Intellectual

Gramsci (1971) theorised that it was necessary to challenge hegemony through a process of developing a culture of counter hegemony. A counter hegemony challenges the dominant ideology; structural change needs to be undertaken in tandem with ideological change. Gramsci drew from Marxist theory of false class consciousness to suggest that liberation requires education and consciousness-raising; this is the role of intellectuals involved with promoting emancipatory change. Such a form of social change requires mass-participation and not in acting for people but in working with people to empower them to act collectively in their own right. However, as a researcher and someone who could be perceived as having a level of 'expert' knowledge I remain constantly aware of the relationship of 'expert' knowledge with the construction and operation of power (Foucault, 1980).

Gramsci defined intellectuals in broad terms as not simply professors, teachers or theologians, but people who have a role to play in supporting the process of emancipation through counter hegemony. He categorised intellectuals through two typologies. Traditional intellectuals are those who define themselves as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group, and are seen this way by society. Gramsci saw this belief in independence as a myth; as such intellectuals are generally conservative and serve the needs of the ruling class. The organic intellectual is a product of the dominant ideological system and it is through this group that hegemony is transmitted. However, Gramsci argued that organic intellectuals develop from the roots of the community and are not primarily 'professionals' employed in elite structures such as education or religious organisations. They could then nurture and develop their own levels of critical consciousness and assist in facilitating this throughout the community, thus extending the process of counter hegemony to support the issues of those oppressed within society. An alliance between traditional and organic intellectuals, in the service of emancipatory change was theorised as a method for creating the space and possibility for developing a counter hegemony. The idea of the organic intellectual as a facilitator for change represents the ideal form of the community worker:

'They can strive to sustain people's critical commitment to the social groups with whom they share fundamental interests. Their purpose is not necessarily individual advancement, but human well-being as a whole' (Smith, 1994 p.127).

As I referred to in chapter one I see my role as someone who works in the community and within an academic environment of supporting and facilitating the process of counter hegemony. I would describe my association with Ian Tolson, both in the context of supporting him as a homeless worker and in our collaborations since as constituting the work of organic intellectuals. I consider my educational perspective as being underpinned through my working-class background and Ian continues to develop his own critical consciousness through education and community work. I consider Ian's continuing work in challenging social inequalities and the negative perspectives of homeless people, which are created via dominant hegemonic processes, as a defining example of the power of people to work in collaboration to achieve emancipatory change. My thoughts and understandings of Gramsci's theories of education as a source for emancipation were further developed and elaborated upon through applying the work of Paulo Freire.

4.3.4   Empowerment and Emancipation

To provide a framework to incorporate the complexity involved with working with homeless people, I am utilizing the theory of Paulo Freire (1972, 1985), which highlights mutual empowerment, cooperative learning and action. Freire's theory is based upon working with, rather than for, people and upon raising critical consciousness. These concepts are congruent as a means of empowering individuals and groups to achieve a level of active participation and promote emancipatory change:

'Emancipation refers to the process of separation from constraining modes of thinking or action that limit perception of and action toward realizing alternative possibilities' (Thomas, 1993, p.4).

Paulo Freire (1921-1997) developed a theory of emancipatory education; his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006) continues to be regarded as a classic text within disciplines across the social sciences and beyond. Freire developed a number of theoretical innovations that have had a wide impact upon the development of

educational theory and practice. For Freire education can be a force for either oppression or liberation, and he critiqued the form of education that establishes the binary opposite of teacher/expert and student/recipient as disempowering. This model of education Freire referred to as the banking model:

> '*Implicit in the banking model is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others... the person is not a conscious being (corpoconsciente); he or she is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty "mind" passively open to the reception of deposits of reality from the world outside*' (Freire, 2006, p.75).

Freire draws from Gramsci's concept of hegemony and theorises that oppression can be challenged through promoting the act of conscientisation. The process of conscientisation is based upon developing a critical consciousness that has the power to transform reality. It is an application of critical theory in that it seeks to critique society and identify opportunities for change.

Opportunities for change are discovered through the exploration of generative themes. These themes are the ideas, experiences, issues that are important to the people one is collaborating with. For example, homelessness is important to someone who is experiencing it. The idea and experience of homelessness will form a generative theme, and through discussion and possibly the use of images or media the person will have the opportunity to step back and explore homelessness in new ways. Through this process the possibility of generative change is raised for both the facilitator and the homeless person. Generative change may not provide the solution to the problem but does offer the possibility for reframing and understanding the issue in a different context that may open up possibilities for change. Generative themes were explored through undertaking a workshop at the University of Central Lancashire Freire Conference in 2014. Students I taught at Runshaw College collaborated in organising and facilitating a world cafe event based around homelessness. This event was open to academics, community organisations, community workers, students and homeless people. Images were used as themes for discussion and the event generated a positive dialogue around homelessness and culminated with people requesting the possibility of a follow on conference to discuss possible ways to help homeless people and highlight the wider issues that they had generated.

As part of my own process of development I undertook a training session with a homeless theatre group who perform Forum Theatre, or theatre of the oppressed (Boal, 2000). The group was established by homeless people and the actors have either been or in some cases remain homeless. Performances are based around the real experiences of homelessness and set out to raise people's awareness of the issues through participatory theatre. For me, to participate in this experience was both challenging and consciousness raising. The group consisted of homeless people, students, lecturers and homeless workers. I made a conscious effort to watch how people interacted with each other and consider by what means understanding and respect between the varying groups was formed. Initially, as I expected, people gravitated to those they felt 'similar' to themselves, but as the training session went on and people were pushed collaboratively beyond their comfort zones and a sense of mutual support developed. In particular, I recall one homeless man saying that he thought this whole thing was embarrassing and he didn't want to stay. A group of young students went out with him and spent time just talking together and he decided to come back and took part in the final theatre performance. The power of this experience was not from the finished performance but in levelling the playing field and creating genuine sense of community and support between originally disparate groups of people.

A Freirean view of power and oppression insists that both the oppressor and oppressed have a positive stake in challenging this state and liberation can only be achieved through generating mutual understanding, solidarity and general freedom. Freire's conceptualisation of power differs from Foucault's in that Freire understands power as something that some groups have and other do not:

> '*Washing one's hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral*' (Freire, 1985, p.122).

However, his view maintains an optimistic appraisal that power can be challenged and overcome, despite the operation of social conditioning and hegemony:

> '*It is necessary that the weakness of the powerless is transformed into a force capable of announcing justice. For this to happen, a total denouncement of*

fatalism is necessary. We are transformative beings and not beings for accommodation' (Freire, 2007, p.36).

As previously discussed Freire's, arguably, more optimistic vision of the possibilities for challenging and overcoming oppression will be synthesised with Foucault's more deterministic appraisal of power relations.

4.4   Methodology

Methodology is the '*strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods...*' (Crotty, 2009, p.3).

Informed by a social constructionist epistemology and the overarching theoretical perspective of critical theory, the methodology chosen combines:

a) Action Research (Freire, 2006; Ledwith, 1997, 2012; Zuber-Skerritt, 2003)
b) Ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007)

The combination of Action Research and Ethnography has been selected because the research is underpinned by the theory of generative change. Due to the complex dynamics that political/power relations play in homelessness, this research is being undertaken through Participatory Action Research. Participatory Action Research is directly concerned with issues of power and the political through seeking to empower disenfranchised groups and effect desired change (Bradbury-Huang, 2010); it is also a social process that seeks to understand how individuals are formed and reformed through social interactions in a variety of settings (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). This research seeks to see how homeless people and those who work with them interact and understand each other within the context of a homeless people's support centre, and it is participatory in that it is founded upon the principle of doing research with people and not on them with a view to understanding the knowledge and experiences of the people involved in the centre, both homeless people and those who assist them. It is also practical in nature in that it seeks to make positive changes both in the organisation and working environment and, more importantly, to assist people to make sense of their situations and expand their own knowledge through participating in the research process. It is also participatory in that I will also be conducting research

upon myself in the role of a researcher participant and sharing my knowledge and experiences with others.

Ethnography generates a rich exploration of social conditions and issues. It provides a broad and deep understanding of groups and cultures that generates and expands upon research questions, complementing the cyclical method of action research. An ethnographic approach strives to bring a sense of people's meaning and interpretation into the research (Bryman, 2004).

4.4.1 Action Research

The origins of action research are ambiguous; however, the work of Kurt Lewin is generally cited as the catalyst for the acceptance of action research as a legitimate method of social inquiry (Zuber-Skerritt, 2003; McNiff, 2014).

Lewin defined action research as being undertaken through a series of spiral steps comprised of planning, action and evaluation. The action research process is cyclical in nature and the outcome of the evaluation stage/s informs the direction of the research process. Primarily action research was to be intrinsically linked to social change; research was not an end goal in itself but part of a wider social process combining thought and action:

> *'The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice'* (Lewin, 1948, p.202-3).

For Lewin action research was a participatory process that required the inclusion of: '*practitioners from the real social world in all phases of the inquiry*' (McKernan, 1991, p.10). Lewin envisioned research as a democratic process and was influenced by the work of John Dewey (Hammersley, 2002). Despite the apparent success of Lewin's influence in establishing action research as a 'respectable' method of social research, following his death in 1947 action research experienced a decline. The next development of action research was found in the field of education in the 1950's, however:

'This action research movement had largely died out by the end of the 1950s. But the idea of classroom action research was revived, or perhaps reinvented, by Lawrence Stenhouse, John Elliott and others in Britain in the late 1960s and 1970s, who promoted the concept of the "teacher as researcher"' (Hammersley, 2002, np).

The work of Stenhouse and Elliot is credited with re-establishing action research and it expanded from the confines of education to a wider research arena leading to action research becoming more widely practised as a contemporary research method. However, action research was not simply occurring within the established educational systems. Practitioners had been developing this form of research in a wide variety of contexts and situations, many of them taking place in environments of oppression that constituted a serious risk to those championing the development of emancipatory research. Arguably, action research came to prominence in the 1970s alongside international development organisations declarations of support for 'popular participation', particularly in relation to anti-poverty programs (Cornwall, 2000 p.11). Action research offered a challenge to preconceived notions of 'scientific research' as the only methodology that can establish a 'truth'. Activists such as Paulo Freire developed participatory and emancipatory research approaches as a means of unmasking and demystifying forms of structural inequality and oppression. Cornwall (2000) argues that the participatory action research movement was inspired by and emerged from the work and theories of Paulo Freire and its roots are steeped in social activism.

Action research, and in particular participatory action research (PAR) or emancipatory action research (EAR), challenges the positivist sciences by highlighting the need for a moral conscience for research. Scientists may continually develop technology and push at the boundaries of the unknown, yet at the same time children in poorer countries die from starvation or a lack of clean drinking water. PAR/EAR has its value base firmly set in understanding and challenging such issues as poverty and social inequality through working with people who experience injustice and giving their voice and knowledge equal respect and credence to 'scientific' knowledge. They also go further: these ways of generating knowledge and understanding the world are not simply means of finding out 'facts' or measuring and explaining phenomena, but are

inherently political and 'active' in operation. The point is to change the world for the better and not simply to understand it and accept the forms of inequality and oppression that underpins many structures. It is through this approach that the links between action research and community development can be clearly defined.

Thus, if we define poverty as the problem of the poor then research will measure levels of poverty and develop scales to define absolute and relative forms. However, if people's consciences are troubled, changes may be made in respect of certain policies and forms of amelioration developed to reduce the effects of poverty. For example, welfare states were developed in response to popular demands and concerns for maintaining the status quo against the possible rebellion of the working class poor in industrialised societies (Fraser, 1992). Statistics from the UK demonstrate that whilst the welfare state remains a valuable and heroic achievement, despite consecutive and ongoing assaults to reduce its impact by governments of all parties, poverty remains a desperate issue for many of the poorest citizens:

> *'The UK is the world's sixth largest economy, yet 1 in 5 of the UK population live below our official poverty line, meaning that they experience life as a daily struggle'* (Oxfam, 2015).

The issue of poverty therefore needs to be viewed as a structural problem, a problem of privilege, power and the distribution of resources and opportunities. PAR/EAR should set the research within such realities and work with those who are facing these issues to develop an understanding of their operation and seek a means of challenging their dominance as 'social facts'.

Ledwith (2016, p.148) highlights that participatory action research shares a common value base with community development:

- *Social justice and environmental justice;*
- *Values of equality, respect, dignity, trust, mutuality and reciprocity;*
- *Working* with *and not* on *people;*
- *Using non-controlling methods;*
- *Working mutually as co-researchers and not controlling researchers;*
- *Different ways of knowing the world.*

The shared value base in community development and participatory action research makes this method the clear choice for undertaking research that seeks to drive positive social change and challenge inequality.

Action research is a methodology underpinned by critical theory in that it demands of the researcher that they fully consider their own and wider social, political and historical contexts (Schön, 1983). The combination of critical theory and action research in investigating the relationships and views of staff, volunteers and homeless people, within an organisational environment provides the means to remain constantly reflective and question one's own motives and values in addition to incorporating the multiple layers of ideology and power that permeate throughout organisations.

> *'Critical theory has always criticised both the objectifying practices of management and the managerial ideology of the harmonious relationship between management and employees' interests... action research was seen as a "critical social science" (Moser, 1975) – and as a way of bringing together critical social theory and practice'* (Weiskopf & Laske, 1996, p.123).

Due to the complex dynamics that political/power relations play in homelessness, this research is being undertaken through incorporating participatory action research. Participatory action research is directly concerned with issues of power and the political through seeking to empower disenfranchised groups and effect desired change (Bradbury-Huang, 2010). As I am situated as a participant/researcher, through my role as a volunteer worker with homeless people and my position as an academic researcher, action research provides me with a method that combines personal reflection and critique with generative change. However, I concur with McNiff (2013) that action research should not be understood as a 'thing' in itself; indeed McNiff argues

> *'there is no such "thing" as "action research". It is a form of words that refers to people becoming aware of and making public their processes of learning with others, and explaining how this informs their practices'* (McNiff, 2013, p.24).

This description of action research refers to a theoretical framework and principles that guide practice:

'the term always implies a process of people interacting together and learning with and from each other in order to understand their practices and situations, and to take purposeful action to improve them' (McNiff, 2013, p.25).

However, this research is not described as purely action research based; every effort was made to undertake the research in a participatory form but due to the constraints of the process of doctoral research, ultimately certain areas of the research were controlled and/or influenced by me. The research question itself was not generated by homeless people and thus it cannot be claimed that they were full participants at every stage of the research process. During interviews often homeless people would want to discuss topics unrelated to the research project. I felt it was my privilege to be in the position of trust to have these dialogues and that it would be against my beliefs to limit or restrict the interviews purely to areas appertaining to the research. However, this meant that I collected far more data than I could use and I have experienced the dilemma of having to decide whose voice is heard within the research. I also experienced the uncomfortable position of homeless people asking me to directly challenge some aspects of the services delivered that went beyond my remit as a researcher. To have followed up on some of these areas would have meant reflecting upon the very nature of the research and possibly considering radically changing the focus of the research, something that I did not feel in a position to undertake. Thus I compromised through remaining faithful to the principles of self-reflection and praxis through the research while acknowledging that the level of participation involving homeless people upon the research design falls short of my own expectations of a solely action orientated research project.

The values of the researcher form an explicit and fundamental part of the research; they are not to be discarded and considered as unscientific, as is arguable through some forms of positivist research. Values are to be explored and 'lived' through the research process. For example, I believe that homeless people are excluded from partaking in many areas of discourse and debate, and it is my aim to assist in challenging and reducing the processes of exclusion. I also believe that research should have a commitment to human well-being and that forms of action research hold the promise to achieve these ends. This involves me as a researcher having a personal

commitment to action and the courage to speak out and challenge what may be accepted practice in support of challenging forms of oppression.

4.4.2 Ethnography

Ethnography traces its roots back to anthropology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The study of cultures, traditions and social organisation can be found in the work of Herodotus (484-425 BC). Herodotus travelled and studied Greek and Persian culture and the tensions between the two competing civilizations. Ethnography was historically defined as a descriptive account of, usually a non-Western, culture or community (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). However, this is a narrow interpretation of ethnography that omits, for example Engel's (1845) conditions of the working class, a study of the conditions of the poor in Manchester during the industrial revolution compiled from observations and contemporary reports. I would further argue that historical accounts of the development of ethnography often neglect to highlight that ethnographic studies generally concentrate on the position of the marginalised or oppressed, and ethnographic accounts of the wealthy and powerful have, generally, been undertaken from more *'remote observations points'* (Gilding, 2010). Gilding draws attention to the fact that the majority of research undertaken within the realm of issues such as homelessness predominantly focuses on those in the position of least authority and power. In the case of homelessness research, it is predominantly homeless people, often viewed through the lens of cultural deviance, rather than housing policies or the culture among housing departments and service providers being the focus of research. The idea of remote observation points refers to the power that elite groups have to control or suppress research. Access may be granted but people who have a high degree of status and economic power may be able to use this power to influence the level of access and direction of the research. The existence of remote observation points highlights the need for maintaining a Freirean approach to research. For example, Freire's notion of the necessity for the oppressed to develop a critical consciousness is a fundamental component in remaining aware that groups such as the homeless should not be viewed as powerless subjects but given the space to critique their experiences of oppressive systems and challenge the views of those who hold the power.

Ethnographic studies rejected positivism and developed an alternative view of social research which was termed naturalism. Naturalism argued that positivist approaches to studying human behaviour were misguided, as '*human behaviour is continually constructed, and reconstructed, on the basis of people's interpretations of the situations they are in*' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 8). Naturalism has come to be challenged as sharing the common facet of positivism, in that the social phenomenon under study is an object that exists independently of the researcher. As Hammersley & Atkinson (2007) contest people construct their social world through their interactions with it and their interpretations of it. These are mediated through the process of enculturation, but are not defined by it; people maintain the ability to exercise a level of agency and are not simply programmed by culture (Elder-Vass, 2012).

Ethnography generates a rich exploration of social conditions and issues. It provides a broad and deep understanding of groups and cultures that generates and expands upon research questions, complementing the cyclical method of action research. An ethnographic approach strives to bring a sense of people's meaning and interpretation into the research (Bryman, 2004). However, ethnography covers a broad spectrum of theoretical and practical approaches and applications.

Ethnography has a complex and multidisciplinary history. It is due to this complexity that ethnography '*does not have a standard, well-defined meaning*' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). However, Hammersley and Atkinson reason that despite this a core definition can be created by primarily focusing on what ethnographers do:

1. *People's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts, rather than under conditions created by the researcher – such as experimental setups in highly structured interview situations. In other words research takes place 'in the field'.*

2. *Data are gathered from a range of sources, including documentary evidence of various kinds, but participant observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.*

3. *Data collection is for the most part relatively 'unstructured', in two senses. First, it does not involve following through a fixed and detailed research design specified at the start. Second, the categories that are used for interpreting what people say or do are not built into the data collection*

process through the use of observation schedules or questionnaires. Instead they are generated out of the process of data analysis.

4. *The focus is usually on a few cases, generally fairly small-scale, perhaps a single setting or a group of people. This is to facilitate in-depth study.* [Note: This point is contestable as there have been a number of ethnographic studies undertaken involving a large number of people and across multiple sites (Spradley, 1980).]

5. *The analysis of data involves interpretation of the meanings, functions, and consequences of human actions and institutional practices, and how these are implicated in local and perhaps also wider contexts. What are produced, for the most part, are verbal descriptions, explanations, and theories; quantification and statistical analysis play a subordinate role in most* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, pp.2-3).

The points stated map the way in which this was research conceived and undertaken; the research was carried out 'in the field' at two specific sites used by homeless people; participant observation, interviews and informal conversations provided the primary data and interpretations were generated from the data. The study was small scale and the rationale was to provide a deeper level of insight. The findings were qualitative in nature and macro level links with micro level insights and experiences were developed.

4.4.3   Critical Ethnography

As a critical theorist I concur with Thomas (1993) that one should maintain a consistent and critical stance during the research process and thus I would classify myself as taking the standpoint of a critical ethnographer. The key difference between a critical ethnography and a conventional ethnography is that a conventional ethnography seeks to describe and understand the way things are whilst a critical ethnography challenges the taken for granted assumptions of the status quo and asks the question of the way things could be (Thomas, 1993). As a researcher critical ethnography is the method by which I can bring critical theories, for example those of Freire (2006) and Gramsci (2012) into my practice. Critical ethnography is the 'action' that accompanies the 'thinking' of critical theory and underpins my ideals of praxis.

Critical ethnography has been theorised to have developed out of the convergence between trends in epistemology and social theory. This convergence of ideas began in the field of educational research through a desire to break with the dominance of quantitative methodology and methods. This break ran alongside the interpretative movement in sociology that sought to move beyond overly deterministic structural theories. Critical theorists, primarily those working within the feminist and Marxist theoretical schools, saw the opportunity to create a critical ethnography that could merge theories of structure and agency and break from past orthodoxy (Anderson, 1989). Critical ethnography differs from conventional ethnography through remaining conscious to the fact that people's interpretations are linked to their socio-economic and historical positions within social structures. Power relations and how they are perceived, hidden or negotiated remain a primary focus throughout critical ethnography.

Critical ethnography is not critical in the sense of simply criticising a practice or set of relations. It seeks to move beyond criticism, it recognises that oppression occurs at many levels of society (Freire, 2006) and challenges forms of repression to promote emancipatory change. Critical ethnography is an inherently political activity and in opposition to the paradigm arguing that research must be an objective and value neutral process:

> '*Critical ethnographers celebrate their normative and political position as a means of invoking social consciousness and societal change*' (Thomas, 1993, p.4).

Critical ethnography draws from Freire's approach to developing critical consciousness as a means for liberation:

> '*the overriding goal of critical ethnography is to free individuals from sources of domination and oppression*' (Anderson, 1989).

The research demonstrates the forces of domination and oppression in relation to how they impact upon homeless people. However, many of these forces remain masked or go unchallenged by both homeless people and those working to assist them. A primary reason for undertaking research through critical ethnography is to draw attention to the social structures that cause homelessness and the stigma that is attached to homeless people through the process of working to explore and raise critical

consciousness and working with people to see beyond the day to day struggles and explore the nature of the structures of oppression and inequality that lie at the heart of homelessness.

4.4.4   *The Political Nature of Research*

I strongly hold the belief that as human beings we are inherently political and that politics should not be classified as a realm that is remote and disconnected from the everyday experiences of living. Mills (1973) in his work illustrating the sociological imagination highlighted how public issues which may threaten the workings of social and economic systems are disarmed through classifying and presenting them as private troubles belonging to the realm of the individual. For example, unemployment and homelessness are not products of economic or social forces, but are to be found in the behaviour and action of individuals: the unemployed are feckless and lazy. In this manner issues are depoliticised and relegated to the realm of the individual. Critical ethnography seeks to unmask the workings of power, challenge modes of oppression and embrace the political nature of the human condition: '*critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose*' (Thomas, 1993, p.4).

As a researcher using critical ethnography I have a duty to make my position clear to those I am researching with/on; although many researchers plead their case that research is something that is done collaboratively in each and every instance, I believe that the power and influence we hold as researchers makes this a noble aim that we should strive for but that we should remain reflexive in revealing the challenges and failures in ultimately achieving this. My research is critical in intent and does seek to highlight and generate theories and ultimately action for change. Others may not share this worldview and may not wish to participate in such research. Such positions present the critical ethnographer with challenges and opportunities: challenges to gain access to areas of research, but also opportunities to engage with people in competing discourses that are inherently political in nature. For this research I had to negotiate with members of the board, staff, volunteers and homeless people the remit of the research. The critical nature of the research raised tensions and issues within the charity and a constant process of negotiation and openness was necessary to maintain relations. Compromise was achieved through making my work accessible to all

participants throughout and accepting critique of my research and negotiating 'meanings' when disagreements arose.

4.5   Methods

The methods used in the research are: a) Participant Observation and b) Interviews. The following section will discuss the choice of methods and how they were implemented.

4.5.1   Participant Observation

Participant observations were planned and carried out over a number of days at the sites of the HtH offices and The United Reform Church, where meals are served to members of the community, including the homeless, one night per week. Participants were informed of the research project, its aims and objectives and my role as researcher; staff and volunteers were briefed to inform service users of my role and the research context, and to inform newcomers of my research. I met with all prospective participants and explained the aims of the research in depth. I was open in explaining that I wished the research to be as participatory as possible but that there would be some constraints due to the nature of the research as being used for a PhD. I felt I had to be very honest and open about my stake in the research and how it may benefit me. Most of the participants already had a working relationship with me as co-volunteers or as homeless people and thus already knew my intentions behind undertaking the research. I was asked a few difficult questions, such as how will this research help change anything and answered that I felt this was about more than just the research and was a platform to establish a dialogue and let people be heard. Due to the public nature of the research sites, people would be entering the building while I undertook the research and it wouldn't be possible to get written consent from everyone who passed through. To address this issue it was agreed that should anyone raise an objection to being observed, it was agreed that I would postpone my observations.

Participant observation was selected as a method primarily because I am a long-term volunteer at HtH and am already known to staff, volunteers and many of the homeless

people who attend. In addition, participant observation was selected because the research aimed for participants to become research partners and collaborate in the analysis of the observations and contribute to theory-building (Clark et al, 2009). I rationalised that to radically alter my behaviour and observe people without undertaking my 'normal' role would have been disconcerting and possibly threatening for participants. I based my observations around the theory of Spradley (1980) and his dimensions of social situations approach. This framework provides a holistic approach to observations. Through operating reflexively and grounding my observations within this framework, day-to-day occurrences, conflicts, power relations and small improvements and positive exchanges/relationships that may pass unnoticed and unreported have been logged and noted. Spradley theorised that the observer should be aware of the following criteria when undertaking their observations:

1. *Space: the physical place or places*

2. *Actor: the people involved*

3. *Activity: a set of related acts people do*

4. *Object: the physical things that are present*

5. *Act: single actions that people do*

6. *Event: a set of related activities that people carry out*

7. *Time: the sequencing that takes place over time*

8. *Goal: the things that people are trying to accomplish*

9. *Feelings: the emotions being expressed* (Spradley, 1980, p.78)

Spradley (1980) refers to four levels of participation ranging from 'low' engagement to 'high':

1. *Firstly, '*passive participation*' involves the ethnographer being present at the scene but without interacting or participating with those s/he is observing, for example standing at a bus stop.*

2. *'*Moderate participation*' involves maintaining a balance between participation and observation. This may involve fluctuating between simply observing and participating in some ways.*

3. *The third level refers to '*active participation*'. This involves doing what the people in the study situation do to gain insight into the cultural codes and rules for behaviour.*

4. *The final stage involves '*complete participation'. *The researcher is this case tends to already be a member of the group/situation to be studied* (Spradley, 1980, p.58).

My level of participation was situated between the third and fourth points on Spadley's scale. I am not, nor have ever been, a homeless person and as such cannot claim to have any experiential knowledge of the homeless experience, or make claim to be a member of any homeless 'community' or group. However, I have worked alongside homeless people and actively participated with the same tasks and routines that homeless people undertook. I have been and remain a volunteer at HtH, and so, I would argue that my participation level when engaging with other volunteers fell within stage four. However, the fact that I made explicit my duality of roles as a researcher/volunteer could have impacted upon how I was perceived by other volunteers and restricted their level of participation with me. Possibly, through filtering or being cautious with the information they chose to share with me as a researcher, or conversely they may have felt able to express things that they might have withheld from a researcher they had no previous relationship with.

I am also aware that having formed working relationships with the volunteers that, regardless of any efforts on my part, it is a part of human interactions to make stronger or weaker connections with people based upon our own prejudices, interests and social and cultural backgrounds. As such some of the volunteer participants may have perceived me more in the role of a friend while others may have viewed me purely as a volunteer/researcher. I would advise the reader to remain aware of these issues when reading the thesis findings. Although I have attempted to mitigate any possible bias in the findings linked to the nature of my relationship with fellow volunteers, I feel a note of caution is warranted in placing my interactions with the volunteers as a possible factor in influencing the nature of the interview data in certain circumstances.

Due to the sensitive and confidential nature of much of the work and interactions that occur at HtH, visual recordings were deemed inappropriate for the situation. Recording the observations audibly via a Dictaphone was considered, but rejected due the problem of gaining consent from different people entering the building who were not research participants. The issue of background noise and interference also presented

problems for audio taping. Thus I undertook recording my findings by using a notebook; this presented challenges in recording everything accurately and I attempted to mitigate this as far as possible through writing up my observations at the earliest opportunity, and making the excuse to have a break should I feel that I needed to record a particular observation that I considered was either very important to the research or too complex to recall in detail at a later point.

I began my observations at the descriptive level and moved on to a more focused and finally a selective level as I became more comfortable with the process and more aware of the situations as they occurred. I attempted to undertake my early observations without concentrating on any specific questions or areas of inquiry, to familiarise myself with the observation process and to gain the trust of the participants and maintain my positions as a volunteer/researcher.

Spradley (1980) discusses the difficulty in maintaining the 'authentic' voice of the research participants in the ethnographic study. He argues that researchers have a natural tendency to fall back on what he terms as an amalgamated language when writing up field notes (Spradley, 1980, p. 66). I concur that this is an issue and as a researcher I have attempted to overcome this through writing up what I believed to be important phrases verbatim when possible. This process was challenging and often I had to resort to condensing passages into key phrases or groups of words as time and privacy allowed. In addition to the participant observations semi-structured interviews were undertaken with participants representing homeless people, staff and volunteers at HtH.

4.5.2   Interviews

To advance an understanding of how HtH operates and is perceived by service users, I also undertook interviews with staff and volunteers. Volunteers and service users were provided with information on the research and given the opportunity to participate. Self-selection was chosen as the research aimed to be open and empowering and self-sampling was considered a means of reducing researcher coercion in the selection process. The research was promoted through flyers and posters that I placed at HtH and through volunteers making homeless people aware of the research. It was open to all the volunteers and to homeless people who expressed an interest in the research,

regardless of whether they chose to participate in the food distribution project or not. I decided upon this approach as I felt it was equally important to listen to the views of people who did not want to participate and to try and better understand why this may be the case. Non-participation is not necessarily the product of apathy but can be an active form of resistance or rejection of a particular intervention or system. If HtH are to promote the involvement of homeless people then it is vital that they gain an understanding as to why levels of participation may be low and examine how to adjust their practices if these are found to be a barrier to participation.

Self-selection does have drawbacks; participants may well have prior knowledge, or interest in the research and those with a higher degree of confidence or communication skills may be over-represented. However, for the initial stages of the study, this method was successful in providing a cross section of service user and volunteer participants. Interviews were undertaken with the manager of HtH, six volunteers and eight homeless people. The manager was the only paid member of staff during the time I undertook the research. I felt it important to include the observations and opinions of the manager as this person had the responsibility for the daily running of the charity and met with the board to report on how the service was being delivered as well as any concerns, including those raised by volunteers. However, as the sole paid member of staff I accept that there may be issues around interviewing and possibly a greater need to be cautious when analysing the data. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to have had a pool of paid staff to interview and compare responses with but unfortunately this wasn't the case. I was also aware that as the only paid staff member protecting the individual's identity would be problematic. The individual concerned informed me that they were happy for their comments to be used and that they would be leaving the organisation before the research was completed, not through any conflict or unhappiness with the position, but to take up other opportunities.

The plan was to interview each person twice, at the beginning and again after a twelve month period to establish the views of the participants on their perceived benefits/problems with being involved in an ABCD based project. However, two of the homeless participants were no longer available to undertake the second interview and regretfully a key member of the HtH volunteer team, who had been deeply involved

with the establishment of the ABCD project, passed away after a severe illness during the course of the research. Initially, I intended to identify interviewees using a system of numbers. However, due to the small pool of interview subjects and the sometimes critical nature of comments made, I decided that the potential for identifying individuals was too great. I therefore opted to use an anonymous system of simply labelling comments as coming from staff, volunteer or homeless person. However, due to his particularly close relationship to and personal interest in the research, Ian Tolson specifically requested to be named within this thesis and has provided a signed waiver in respect of this.

Interviews were carried out at HtH and each interview was initially scheduled to last around an hour. This was extended to up to two hours after discussions with my supervisory team about the need to respect and provide time for participants whilst taking account of limits on my own and the organisation's time and space.

I believe that the research process should respect the value of the narratives and worldviews of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As such, I used interviews that were loosely semi-structured, giving respondents the opportunity to discuss issues as freely and openly as was practical. I believe that there can be no truly 'unstructured' interview, as dialogue itself demands a structure: as a researcher I began to create a mental structure at the outset of my research, choosing to direct my investigations toward uncovering certain types of information with my research tools and methods inevitably being shaped by this (Gubrium & Silverman, 1985).

4.6   Data Analysis

The interview data was transcribed verbatim from the original recordings. I undertook the transcription as I felt that this would be a valuable skill to learn and that through the process I would have the opportunity revisit the interview conditions and gain a deeper understanding of the data. I chose to use a form of thematic analysis based upon the work of Attride-Stirling (2001). I departed from the procedure in that I found using three levels of thematic analysis appeared to create a high degree of repetition within the analysis and I felt that a two level system offered enough scope for a more detailed and focussed framework.

The process I undertook was as follows:

1. I read through the transcripts and after repeated readings discarded material judged to be beyond the scope and remit of the research. Initially I purposefully kept the remit of useful material very wide so as not to limit the scope of the findings. This process was challenging as much of the interview data collected represented rich and often powerful accounts of the lives and struggles of homeless people. However, some of this data did not provide any links or insights into ABCD or perceptions of the experience of being a homeless person, either accessing services from or participating with HtH. However, I feel obliged to respect the biographical and narrative nature of the respondent's interviews and have attempted to remain aware to ground extracts of data I have taken within their wider narrative. It is my wish that this extra data may be revisited to form the basis for further research on how people experience and conceptualise homelessness.

2. I then examined the texts for examples of actions or experiences of the interviewees. I attempted to approach the data through an inductive approach in an effort to allow the themes to emerge from the data. However, qualitative data analysis often raises the issue of whether the researcher has or can be seen to have taken a fully inductive approach to the analysis (Hammersley, 2008). My position is that as a researcher and someone who has worked and volunteered within the field of homelessness I will bring my own thoughts and initial concepts to the research and methods of how organise and analyse the data. I had constructed the initial research question based upon examining ABCD as it was operating within HtH, and I consider that I came to the research with some assumptions and established research parameters.

3. The initial data collected was primarily descriptive and aimed towards capturing the experience of what the respondent was saying – e.g. feelings on homelessness and thoughts on organisational change. I gave each category a letter and these were used to build up a 'bigger picture' of the overall themes and content (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The process was repeated through examining further texts and undertaking comparisons. At this point I searched for negative cases within the data as a means of confirming patterns within the

data or of revising and broadening the analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). To provide an example, one of my research problems was to try and establish whether the homeless people who participated in the research considered they belonged to a homeless community. The initial analysis suggested that they did not consider that a homeless community existed, but through looking for opposing or negative cases I discovered that this analysis was too simplistic. Some respondents actually questioned the utility of a homeless community without denying its existence, whilst others inferred that they didn't want to belong to a homeless community.

4. I grouped the text/s into sentences and phrases that shared a linked meaning or perception (Mostyn, 1985). The transcripts were examined using the research question as a lens. This meant examining the texts in reference to the experiences of homeless people and volunteers of participating, or feeling unable or restricted to participate, in an asset-based homeless project. Topics that were mentioned repeatedly in the transcripts by homeless people and volunteers, such as the effects of homelessness upon people, were considered to constitute a theme (Attride-Stirling, 2001). In addition supporting data from a prolonged period of observations and my own historical and working knowledge of HtH was drawn upon. Sections of the texts, words or phrases considered relevant to exploring the participant's experiences, thoughts and feelings around the research question were assigned a code. The process could be considered as comprising: '*the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorising data'* (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p.61).

5. I went through the text/s of all respondents, both homeless people and volunteers/workers, and wrote down words and headings that summarised the themes contained. For example I found the following key words/phrases/related expressions recurring in the interview transcripts, and within my observational notes, when people talked about their experiences and sense of what they thought it meant to be homeless:

Rejection, Loss, Stigma, Confusion, Fault, Anger, Acceptance, Repetition.

I drew these themes up in the form of a table to facilitate analysis. The phrases were checked against the interview transcripts to review the meaning in context, as I found that certain phrases meant different things when taken out of and replaced back into their full context. I categorised the data based upon my interpretation of the strength of the 'fit' between the excerpt and the theme. An example of the table used may be seen below.

Table 2: Example of Interview Themes

Theme: Homelessness and Loss	Strong example	Medium example	Possible inference
	"Being on the streets isn't any good for anyone; no-one wants to know you and you lose respect for yourself."	"I reckon I am probably always going to feel, you know, like when does this all get taken away then? Things never seem to last or go well for me for any length of time."	"I think it is hard to get back to where you were when you have been homeless."
	"I have lost everything and everyone through homelessness."	"You lose your sense of drive and can't be bothered anymore."	"I am not how people see me"

I grouped these under the organising theme of experiences of homelessness as they represented the responses and concerns of the participants. Some words and phrases could have multiple meanings and refer to different contexts. Where this occurred

they were originally assigned under all the themes they may represent and highlighted to check with the respondents if possible to establish meaning, or to be re-read in the context of the complete interview and compared with other texts. For example the phrase: "*I am not how other people see me*", when taken out of the interview context may have many meanings. However, when read in the contexts of the interview it was clear that the person was relating this to being homeless. However, I feel that a sense of loss is only one possible interpretation and I also placed this under the theme of homelessness and identity. Once created, the networks were explored and analysed through going back to the texts and re-reading in the light of the possible network relationship. Below is an example of how the themes were organised:

Diagram 1: How Interview Themes were Organised

To strengthen the authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of the research, I discussed two transcripts with the participants to ensure that the meanings derived from the texts mirrored their original interviews, and sought further guidance from my supervision team. I constantly challenged myself to practice reflexivity throughout the research and to see myself as explicitly involved as an actor in co-creating knowledge with others (Lincoln & Guba, 1981). These processes assisted me in self-reporting on my own growth and learning as a co-producer and thus provide an authentic account of the research as is possible.

For analysing the data, I used the MAX-QDA package. I selected this package after receiving a recommendation from a member of my PhD supervisory team. My original plan was to use a simple word processer system as I feel that we can become overly reliant upon technology and the process of analysing data and generating themes is not something that can be replaced with a technological fix. However, having received a demonstration of this system from a practising researcher it was clear that it provided some time saving benefits.

I also formed a small working group of people not related to the research to provide their opinions on my analysis and findings. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend peer involvement and debriefing as means of establishing trustworthiness within the research. The group consisted of a colleague who has an extensive knowledge and career in community development, a volunteer from a charity with links to HtH, and a small group of students that I taught on a community development related degree. My rationale for using this method was that I felt that my position as a researcher and volunteer at HtH required me to seek the input of other people outside of this experience to challenge my preconceptions and bias.

I believe that research should be as participatory in nature as is possible and felt that although it was not always possible to increase the participation of homeless people, due to ethical and organisational reasons, it would be valuable to include the input of members of the community through methods such as the working group. Schwandt (1996) forwarded the position that social research should seek to develop critical intelligence among all those involved with the research. I agree with this position and feel that the inclusion of the working group went some way to achieving this. The group was beneficial in that it helped me to revisit some of my findings and clarify to what extent any changes can be linked to ABCD working. I did find that my own culture and experiences led me to follow a particular avenue of inquiry that was open to different interpretations. For example, some of these benefits gained by homeless people I assumed could be a product of ABCD; however, members of the group highlighted that these outcomes could equally be a product of staff/volunteers and homeless service users working together in a more therapeutic and less formal way, and questioned to what extent (if any) ABCD may have informed change. I recalled back to my earlier collaborative work with Ian whilst he was homeless and on

reflection although we did draw upon some of the principles of strength-based theory we both concur that if our relationship had been grounded too rigidly upon one particular theoretical model then the process of organic change may have been hampered. Through drawing on the use of a peer group and research participants as co-analysts, where possible, a greater measure of authenticity was sought. However, in the final analysis I freely admit that as a researcher the data will always be coloured by a measure of my own interpretations, and it is open to others to seek and find competing and equally valid interpretations.

4.7   Reflections on Research Methods

In my experience, it is not unusual to read academic research and feel that the process and experience of research is somewhat clinical and divorced from the complex and often emotional reality of human life. Academic research reports often portray the process as a sterile scientific activity that is one of progressing seamlessly from designing the research, developing the methods, gathering the data and writing up the results. The emotional, psychological and physiological impacts on the researcher, and those participating, are often overlooked, or rejected as being damaging to 'objectivity'. Feminist research has gone some way to challenging this orthodoxy; however it could be argued that the 'scientific method' is still the norm. Taking the above into account, it is my intention to provide an account of the struggles I encountered with the research process.

4.7.1   Researcher or Participant: Taking Sides?

My role as a participant observer has been challenging, and allowed me to explore issues relating to researching as an insider/outsider and notions of power and influence (Bartunek & Reis-Loius, 1996). As a volunteer and ex-employee at HtH I feel that I am an 'insider' within the organisation and remain aware of this position and have struggled with the decision of whether and when to 'bracket' my experience and conceptions about the organisation during the research (Asselin, 2003). I find the notion that a researcher can 'bracket' their experience and knowledge of a situation or relationship at odds with my belief in undertaking an open and honest participatory form of research. Going in to HtH as a participatory researcher opened my eyes to the

fact that, no matter how neutral one feels one is being, the perceptions and expectations of the research participants cannot be judged in advance of the research and they do have impacts and consequences upon the researcher and on the relationships with those involved.

One of my key concerns was to undertake the research as a partner with the homeless people and staff/volunteers at HtH and not as an academic 'expert'. From the outset this was a difficult position to hold as some of the staff and volunteers resented my combined role as a researcher and volunteer and became wary of my objectives. Although all volunteers and staff had been provided with the opportunity to be involved in the establishment of the shift towards working in a more asset-based way, and indeed had welcomed this, when the reality of the changing dynamics and relationships required between volunteers and homeless people became prominent a level of resistance to change emerged. Some of this resistance took the form of scape-goating the research for the change and thus some of the volunteers' relationships with me, as the researcher, became strained.

Issues relating to power and influence remained in constant focus as my researcher/volunteer status forced me to remain vigilant of the power and influence that I held within this research; I freely confess to having to struggle with the responsibility to maintain a balance between the duality of the two positions.

Feminist researcher Finch (1996) recognises her moral dilemmas involved in obtaining her detailed data based on building trusting relationships. My position means I have developed trusting relationships with homeless service users and fellow volunteers that may elicit responses and information that may not have been forthcoming had these trusting relationships not been established. However, my previous knowledge and relationships at HtH may also have had the disadvantage of restricting people from openly being critical of others as they would have been aware that I had worked alongside them. My findings would suggest that my previous relationships did not constitute a barrier to people being open; indeed, I was at times uncomfortable with some of the information and comments that people made during the interviews. On occasion it felt as if some of the respondents were treating the interviews as a form of counselling or therapy session and I felt obligated to remind them that this was not the

case. Perhaps some of the volunteers were also trying to 'sway me on-side' against other volunteers or homeless people with differing opinions.

There is a perceived divide in status between some volunteers and homeless service users; it has been a struggle to remain outside of this, and not be seen as being overly on-side with homeless people involved with the organisation. While managing the reaction from some of the volunteers I also experienced the added pressure of a number of homeless people seeing me as being there to 'fight' their corner and use the research to achieve their aims within the organisation. This position caused me a lot of angst. As a critical theorist, I believe the research should be used to benefit homeless people and create the conditions for positive change within HtH. However, I was constantly mindful that as a researcher in the midst of undertaking a research project, such a level of activism could have negative consequences upon the research and the participation of volunteers and staff at HtH. Although nothing was overtly said, I could sense a level of disappointment in me from some of the homeless people who saw me as 'on their side'.

One of the primary issues I struggled with throughout the research process was my own identity and position as researcher/participant/ volunteer/part-time teacher/husband and father. Managing all of these identities and the responsibilities involved in each role was a complex, challenging and emotionally and physically draining experience. At the outset of the research I had a clear vision of why I wanted to undertake the research and who/what it was for; my goal was to use the research to help give a greater voice and sense of agency to the homeless people and volunteers at HtH. This vision has stayed with me, and often supported me through the difficult times throughout the research. However, it has often been a challenge to hold on to this as the demands of the PhD, the competing perspectives and objectives of the homeless people, staff and volunteers at HtH, and maintaining my own levels of emotional and physical health all placed demands upon my resilience. I would often feel emotionally and physically drained after a long period of observations/interviews, and my own health and well-being did suffer towards the end of the research.

4.7.2   Methodology/Methods

As a practitioner within the homelessness field, I have developed a way of working with homeless people that I feel has achieved positive outcomes for those I have worked with, and benefitted my own growth as a human being. Theoretically I am driven by the need to promote and engage with emancipatory forms of research; my personal belief is that research that does not try to change the world for the better is purely an academic exercise of theoretical interest. As such I do not try to define myself or limit my worldview through adhering to one strict theoretical or methodological approach. I found that defining my theoretical approach and developing my methodology and methods was a difficult challenge that caused me to question many of the constructions and conventions of academic research; why do we limit research through demanding labels and positioning researchers into competing theoretical camps? Why is it often seen as academically incongruent to hold what are perceived as competing theoretical perspectives, and who can actually decide what a long-dead theorist meant to say in their work? And most troubling was the ongoing, and perfectly reasonable, criticism of all things academic from homeless people, whose 'common sense' knowledge was often grounded and to my mind equally as valid as academic theory. In the final analysis, after much emotional struggle, I compromised through making the decision that I would have to hold two positions: my working/activist position that operated in the world of doing, human complexities and fallibilities, and my academic position that had to accept certain constraints and forms of practice, if I was to achieve the academic success necessary to pursue the goal of assisting marginalised people to have a greater voice.

My original aim was to undertake the research through the method of action research, as I felt this method provided the most effective means of developing research that is participatory and aimed at generating positive change. However, due to the organisational demands of doing a PhD and the realisation that my reflections on the initial data collected were leading away from my stated research objectives I decided to re-examine my choice of methods. I was concerned that if I did not examine my choice of methodology and methods, the entire research focus could be altered. I felt that I did not have this level of flexibility and that as a fledgling researcher my lack of experience in dealing with such complex issues could jeopardise the research. With

this in mind, after a degree of contemplation and discussions with my supervisory team, I decided to re-examine my methods and the use of action research. I maintain a commitment to and a belief in action research as a method for seeking emancipatory change and have sought to remain as true to the philosophy and practice as possible. Upon reflection I made the decision to incorporate action research methods into the research without undertaking it as a 'pure' action research project.

4.7.3   Researcher Assumptions

I began the research with the assumption that the majority of the homeless people involved would display a certain level of solidarity towards each other and homeless people. This assumption was soundly challenged through my early realisations that many of the homeless respondents were primarily acting in their own interests and had a negative and often derogatory opinion of homeless people in general. These finding made me question some of my fundamental beliefs in human nature and my own concepts of community and society. However, to better understand why people were thinking and acting in this way I was forced to revisit theories of power, oppression and hegemony and apply them to the reality that these people were experiencing. This and other such incidents focused my attention on the impossibility of the 'objective' researcher who comes to the research as a blank slate and makes strictly scientifically valid observations/findings; we bring our own cultural and historical heritage to the research, and it is only through embracing, and sometimes challenging, these that we can truly deliver an emancipatory form of social research.

4.7.4   Whose Voice?

One of the issues that caused me the greatest concern was the responsibility to ensure that the voices of the research participants, both homeless people and volunteers, would be heard within the research and be presented as a reflection of their thoughts and perceptions. As with all research of this nature a level of interpretation is inevitable; however, I felt an enormous responsibility to ensure that my interpretations were as congruent with the perceptions of the participants as was possible. I was constantly aware that without a high degree of self-reflection it could be possible that I would privilege the voices and perceptions of homeless people, either consciously or sub-consciously, to rebalance the position of powerlessness that

they often inhabit. However, I had worked and volunteered with HtH for over a decade and had established strong relationships with volunteers and staff. I am aware of the difficulties and complexities of the role of a volunteer working with homeless people and did not wish to paint an overly negative picture that overlooked the value of the work the volunteers do. Furthermore, who is going to hear these voices and how will they make a difference are issues I still struggle with. If the research remained an academic construct that did not in some way benefit the homeless people involved then I personally will feel that it has not achieved what I would wish. However, a colleague of mine pointed out that many of the respondents may well have gained benefits through being involved, including feeling valued through being listened to and perhaps gaining in confidence or knowledge. I recognise these aspects as valid but still feel a responsibility to use my voice as a vehicle for others to be heard. One of my thoughts is to collaborate with some of the homeless people involved in writing something about how homelessness feels and is experienced that we could take to schools and colleges.

I have undertaken the research and the data analysis in as open and reflective a way as possible but freely admit that there have been many struggles and that in the final analysis my interpretations will be coloured by my own culture, history and experiences. It is my hope that despite these I have done a measure of justice to all the participants and ensured their voices have been given the chance to be heard.

The research findings will be presented and discussed within the following chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 will highlight the data gathered from an extensive period of participatory observation and interviews. Possible interpretations of the meanings and forms of action that may be taken from the findings will be discussed. Reflections upon the research process and the issues I encountered as a participatory observer and the tensions I experienced within my role of researcher and volunteer are documented and reflected upon.

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATIONS

My personal ethos is based around my belief that people have a basic need to tell their story as they wish it to be told and to be understood and respected as human beings. I stand against any form of research that seeks to reduce people to objects or divide people along the lines of those who know (usually academic researchers) and those who are considered objects of research. I therefore chose to undertake the research in as participatory a manner as was possible. I feel that as a researcher and someone who remains committed to social change I needed to remain as close as possible to the people whose voices I wanted to be heard and thus participatory observations provided me with the most accessible method to achieve this aim. Participatory observation may be defined as:

> *'the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting'* (Schensul, Schensul & LeCompte, 1999, p.91).

A key component of my research was to gain a better understanding of the workings of HtH as an organisation from a multiplicity of perspectives. This was necessary to assist in identifying areas of policy or service delivery that worked well or that could be improved in some way to benefit homeless people and volunteers.

Extended periods of participatory observations were carried out at the HtH premises and at the supper club, operated by the United Reform Church (URC). These observations were undertaken to gain knowledge from the duality and shifting situational and relational realities of an insider and outsider perspective (Merton, 1972; Olson, 1977; Spradley, 1980; Deutsch, 1981). As an active volunteer at HtH I came to the research with a high level of knowledge regarding how HtH projects were operated, perceived and understood from a service delivery perspective. By taking on the role of participant-observer I planned to gain a deeper insight into how homeless people felt and experienced their involvement and interactions with HtH. A description of the sites at which the observations took place is provided as a means of assisting the reader to place the observations within the context that they occurred. A discussion detailing the major themes that emerged through the observations is given, followed

by a critique linking the issues to ABCD. The chapter concludes with my reflections on the observation process and the issues it raised.

5.1   Initial Considerations with Participatory Observations

Prior to this research, I had worked and volunteered at HtH for a period of over ten years. My primary concern was, in having such an extensive knowledge of the organisation, whether I would be able to set aside all my accrued ideas and perceptions of HtH and look at the organisation and culture through a different lens (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). I determined that the best course of action would be to accept that I had this knowledge and use it as an advantage within the research. I drew up a list of all my thoughts, feelings and perceptions of HtH. I decided that I would start my observations through analysing these ideas from the standpoint of a researcher.

As in any organisation there is a certain set of cultural norms that tacitly operate at HtH: when

> *'...people conduct themselves in an organised way they do so by conforming to regularities of perception, behaviour, belief and value. People do not always conform to every organisational norm, but the encompassing, informal culture will provide the norms that govern how far it is reasonable to depart from the norms specific to the organisation and also how other people will react to those departures. Any lack of suitable cultural meta-norms will limit how far it will be possible to organise at all'* (Stamper, et al, 2000, p. 2).

Volunteers may operate upon an unwritten set of rules and expectations and have an established hierarchy of roles and responsibilities. I was aware that the role of volunteer housing advisor at HtH is perceived as requiring a higher degree of training, responsibility and commitment than is necessarily the case in other roles. A higher degree of volunteer status is attached to the role of housing advisor and yet HtH had not seriously considered that a cultural 'division' between the various volunteer roles tacitly existed. I had previously not given too much critical thought to these issues, as my duties were primarily involved with the tasks of delivering day-to-day services to

homeless people and working to prevent youth homelessness through family mediation. The research provided me with the opportunity and time to able to 'step back' from my role as a volunteer and reflect, and some areas that had been previously masked or simply taken for granted came into clearer vision.

5.2   Observations: Issues of Power and Surveillance

I was slightly uncomfortable at the outset of the observations with the subtle differences in volunteers' attitudes towards me. I felt that I would be able to carry on as a volunteer and undertake the research in a way that was natural to me, consistent with my previous work in organisation, and in an unobtrusive manner. However, after I had informed everyone of my role and the purpose of the research there appeared an initial sense of unease among some of the volunteers: possibly a sense of mistrust or unease with my motives? Perhaps the volunteers felt that I was in some way spying on them and would be reporting back to the board, which was not my intention at all. I checked out this perception through talking to the volunteers and accepting that they had a justified reason for feeling this way that it was my duty to respect and respond to it. Upon reflecting on the issue I confirmed with the volunteers that I would not be interviewing or including members of the board within the research process to ensure that the focus remained upon the volunteers and homeless people involved.

I picked up a certain underlying annoyance that through looking at alternative ways to work the volunteers felt that their personal working practice was being criticised. To mitigate these assumptions I explained that the research was concerned primarily with improving opportunities and outcomes for homeless people, and that any criticism of working practices would apply equally to me in my role as a volunteer. Some of these conversations were difficult, in that I felt bound to disclose that as a critical theorist I would be looking at how we worked with homeless people and identify issues that emerged as problematic. One volunteer declined to participate at this point. However, the majority expressed that they were now comfortable and understood why it was important for the research to remain critical.

To further reduce these tensions I met with the volunteers and restated what my role as a researcher was and what I was looking at during my observations. I asked whether

it would be possible for me to spend some time away from my normal voluntary roles of advising and mediation to work with people packing the food parcels. This discussion helped in dispelling some of the concerns people had with the research. Participating in a different role from my usual volunteer activities ensured I was approaching something as a novice and would have to 'learn the ropes'; this helped me to remain aware and conscious to ensure that participating with homeless people and volunteers at the task in hand did not take second-place to observing. Many of the insights I gained emerged from simply conversing with people while working rather than through observing others. Within a few weeks of beginning the participatory observations I felt that I was starting to be perceived as 'just' another volunteer who was also doing some research to hopefully benefit homeless people.

I gained a further insight into observation through experiencing it 'from the other side of the fence'. As discussed in Chapter 1, I undertook a teaching position as a lecturer in community and social care at an adult college. Although an adult college, the site acts as a satellite for a large college that primarily delivers further education courses to sixteen to nineteen year olds. As this is the core service, the policies and procedures at the adult site are run consistently upon the further education model. This entails a high degree of monitoring of teaching staff and an approach to teaching which is, in my opinion, overly structured and rigid in application. As a condition of my employment I am regularly observed and monitored.

Observations can take place at any time and teaching staff are given feedback on the observations. Feedback takes the form of grading and if a teacher receives a grade three then they are required to undergo further training and a prolonged period of intensive observations. Some teaching staff may resent this form of observation and see it as oppressive, describing it in terms of surveillance. I agree with many of the comments of my colleagues, and also feel uneasy and that I am constantly under watch; I am only ever as good as my last teaching session, and through having one bad day I could be put under more pressure.

I also feel that the observations have a negative impact upon many students. I work collaboratively with my students and see us as engaged in a joint learning process. However, the system is based very much upon the lines of a banking model of education, with the added irony that teachers are expected to demonstrate new and

innovative methods yet still pass observations based upon opposing criteria. In addition, I noticed that being observed can itself trigger changes in behaviour, caused simply by knowing that someone is watching you. During observations I found myself teaching in a different way, in order to better reflect what I believed the observer might be looking for, rather than teaching how I would have normally done; equally, my students also participated less vocally in class and appeared wary and less relaxed than usual during sessions where an observer was present. In this way, the very act of observing my class caused changes that meant that the classroom interactions they observed were not authentic representations of 'normality'. Through reflecting on this experience, I can appreciate the unease that volunteers and homeless people may feel about the process of observation and the fact that my observations might have caused them to behave differently than they would have otherwise, and therefore I have tried to mitigate this as much as possible.

5.3   Observational Sites

The observations took place at two locations: at the HtH offices, where people receive housing advice and assistance, and where food donations are sorted and distributed to people in need; and at the supper club which is located in a meeting hall at the Chorley URC. Both sites were visited throughout the research to document and examine the experiences and views of homeless people attending and to provide insights into how ABCD was facilitated at each location. This section will begin by detailing the physical environment of the two sites and describing how they operate. It will continue through describing the possible psychological and emotional influences these environments may have upon people working and using them, via the views expressed by research participants, and through my interpretations of the observational data. It will examine the perceptions of participants, as to the level of involvement and participation ongoing at each location and document the views of homeless people around their experiences of accessing the projects. It will conclude with a summary outlining the efficacy of introducing ABCD into the projects and highlight the positive and negative aspects, as reported by the participants and witnessed through the observations.

5.3.1 Help the Homeless Offices

The charity primarily operates from a two storey converted terraced house in the centre of Chorley (see Picture 1, page 296). On the lower floor there is a hallway that is adjacent to the reception/front office. The hallway enters directly from the street and is separated from the reception by a partition wall with a sturdy glass screen from behind which the receptionist takes enquiries and makes appointments (see Picture 6, page 299). The hallway is approximately eight feet long by four feet wide and becomes crowded should more than three people occupy this space (see Picture 2, page 297). There are no chairs in the hallway and people often sit on the floor or lean on the hatch if they are waiting for an extended period of time. The environment makes it difficult for people who attend with a pram or a bicycle, and there is no means of separating people who are attending to make a donation or to ask a general query from homeless people who may be wishing to make a confidential phone call or collect mail. It is dimly lit and the decoration and carpeting are old and threadbare (see Picture 7, page 299). In addition to the security of the hatch at the reception, a heavy security coded door blocks entry to the offices. The atmosphere generated by this environment may be described as claustrophobic and oppressive. The following comments from homeless people regarding this environment were documented during the observations:

> "*I can't hear you from behind the screen – can I not talk to you in the office?*"

> "*I have to pick up my mail here and if I want a drink because I have been a bit loud in the past I have to drink it here, they won't let me in the kitchen, so if other people come in they know my business and I am sure they look at me funny like. Really though, you have to shout sometimes to make yourself heard when the place is packed.*"

Due to the building's small size and lack of space at the reception area, the level of noise can be problematic for workers, volunteers and homeless people. During busy times multiple conversations and telephone calls can be occurring simultaneously and it can become difficult to hear what is being said. I have observed homeless people having to lean forward through the reception hatch to hear better and this causes the receptionist concern. Asking a person to stand back away from the hatch is not the

ideal way to begin a dialogue with a possibly distressed homeless person. The receptionist often has to ask for quiet to answer the phone during busy times, due to the high level of background noise. Such high levels of noise are distracting and it is arguable that they contribute to raising people's levels of stress and anxiety. This may impact upon the well-being of all involved at HtH and reduce the level of effective support and assistance offered to homeless people.

"This place is dark and old and it says that you are homeless so you are not worth anything better."

"It is a bit musty and overcrowded in here – you could do with a bigger building."

These comments were made by homeless people during the observations and illustrate the unsuitability of this environment and the negative impact it has upon engaging with people and building rapport. On one busy morning, a homeless person had an appointment to see a member of staff and had a bicycle with them. The receptionist informed them that the bike must stay outside, to which the person responded that they didn't have a lock and couldn't afford to have it stolen. The receptionist insisted that the bike be left outside, due to a lack of space and safety issues, and so the person left without having their appointment. On another occasion I observed a young mother who appeared to be uncomfortable being in an enclosed space with her baby in a pram with two street homeless men who had come to request food parcels and a warm drink.

Despite these comments and observations security is a valid concern, as the following incident illustrates. A long-term street homeless man, who is well-known to staff, requested to use the telephone to speak with his solicitor regarding a legal issue. As noted the lack of privacy in this environment raises confidentiality and privacy issues but nonetheless his request was granted. During the call he became extremely agitated and started to use expletives to the solicitor. The receptionist interjected at this point and the man became angry and threw the receiver through the open glass partition. He continued to swear at the receptionist and left the building. Such incidents, while rare, do demonstrate the unsuitability of the environment for homeless people and those working in the building.

There is a small food cupboard in the office and a box containing several bags of made up food is left near the reception desk. The receptionist can give out these pre-prepared food parcels without having to leave the desk. However, I documented an occasion when a homeless man had to return most of the contents of the parcel due to his suffering from food allergies. The receptionist refused to open up the other bags to see what they contained so he left with just a few tins of food.

The office and reception area are cramped and also pose issues for confidentiality as people may inadvertently view documents left on the reception desk or overhear comments made by staff in conversation (see Picture 8, page 300). Due to this situation staff often refuse to use this office and choose to work in another room situated on the upper floor. This has the negative impact of overcrowding the second floor office and of limiting the time that advisors spend associating with other volunteers and homeless people.

The kitchen and toilets are situated through the security door adjoining the hallway. The kitchen area is approximately twenty feet by thirty feet and has an adjoining alcove situated under the stairs that is used as a food storage area (see Pictures 4 & 5, page 298). The kitchen area is multi-functional and operates as: the base for food storage; the dating and sorting of foodstuffs and the preparation of food parcels; cooking basic foods, such as soup and making hot drinks; and a computer terminal is situated in this room for homeless people to access and use to link to Citizens Advice Bureaux AdviceGuide, Help Direct and other resources. This space is generally very busy and may be used by people undertaking multiple tasks at the same time. Foodstuffs and other donations are often stored and sorted in this room and it has been reported as a possible cause for health and safety concerns due to the cluttered nature of the space and the presence of potential trip hazards (for example, see Picture 4, page 298 & Picture 8, page 300). Homeless people who wish to have something to eat or drink are often placed in this room, and people accessing advice appointments pass through on the way to the designated upstairs offices. Again, this raises issues of confidentiality and privacy as often homeless people will be discussing personal issues with staff whilst they have something to eat or drink and other people will be passing through this room and may overhear conversations. Some homeless people observed appeared very uncomfortable having something to eat while people

were working in this room and others walking through. I wished to clarify what people actually thought of this situation so struck up conversations with volunteers using this space:

> *"It is not really good is it? I mean I am trying to pack this food and there is no room to move and people keep coming past. We need a bigger place, but what can you do?"*

> *"Yeah, when I help clients use this computer I am very wary that they will probably be wanting advice on something that may be personal… lots of times debt, benefits or maybe legal stuff. Now if that was me I wouldn't want other people looking over my shoulder and even with the screen, well, it isn't exactly private is it?"*

> *"You can't get space to eat your lunch or take a break. I generally have to go out and get my lunch at a cafe in town and to be honest I can't really afford to do this. I am unemployed and volunteer because I was sent by the job centre."*

Homeless people I spoke with presented a similar opinion as to the lack of privacy the situation created:

> *"I don't like people seeing me eating, it makes me feel like I am in a zoo, and like I am a hopeless charity case, you know."*

> *"I am helping to pack this food and stuff but I get uncomfortable when some of the others from the hostel came through here. I am trying to keep my head down and stay away from them but this makes it difficult."*

From my observations, the lack of space and privacy has a negative effect on how people interacted with each other, primarily expressed through feelings of frustration at not being able to find private space to talk, work or simply be alone to think or take a break. Tempers appeared to flare more on busy days and the general atmosphere became noticeably more stressful as the building became crowded. Although difficult to quantify, it is arguable that homeless people reacted to the environment through displaying an increased level of agitation and a reduction in solidarity as they 'competed' with each other for space, time and access to the limited resources HtH has to offer.

A shower and toilet facility leads off from the kitchen area. However, due to the amount of people who access the building the shower was removed to create male and female toilets. This has caused issues for homeless people who used this facility to stay clean and are now limited to having a body wash. Volunteers and staff complained about the lack of staff toilet facilities and the need to share with homeless people. During the project a homeless volunteer took it upon himself to arrange a rota to ensure the toilets were cleaned and his actions were acknowledged by volunteers and staff:

> "*X has done a wonderful job with keeping the toilets clean. We never seem to have the time to stay on top of things like that properly*."

I observed a heated discussion by two volunteers in disagreement as to whether cleaning the toilet it was a suitable role for a homeless volunteer to undertake:

> "*Look, he is doing a good job and I don't see your problem*"

> "*My problem is that a homeless person should not have to clean the toilet. I think this is degrading for him and wrong*."

> "*Well, these jobs need doing and no-one is forcing him to do it, he volunteered*!"

This exchange stayed on my mind and I can see the rationality of both sides of the debate. On the one hand the homeless person was making a positive contribution and was arguably benefitting from being involved and able to use their initiative and contribute. However, I am uneasy that homeless people, who may already be regarded and feel, in some ways, less accepted and valued than other people not in their position are doing the most menial jobs. This could reinforce the perception of homeless people as being 'worthless' and only able to perform certain tasks.

I spent a large part of my time participating in sorting food and packing bags with volunteers and the small number of homeless people who were helping as part of the ABCD project. There were never more than four of us doing this job at a time, primarily due to a lack of space and the fact that there was no need for any more people to undertake the job. We generally worked as a team and when a homeless person was assisting they were just accepted as being there to do the job. We took it in turns to make tea and unload boxes and I witnessed a high degree of cooperative working and

sense of doing a worthwhile job as a team from the people involved. The homeless people working at this task appeared to be enjoying the activity and talk while working was generally light in nature and not based around topics relating to homelessness. It interested me that during the observations I didn't hear a single comment from homeless people about the amount of food being put into each bag or about the proposed conditionality under which it was to be given. I expected that as homeless people they may have felt a certain sense of a vested interest or solidarity with other homeless people in arguing for a larger amount of food in each bag or to resist ideas of conditionality. My strongest sense of unease came from the fact that it was only ever the same two or three homeless people I saw working with the volunteers and options for other people to be involved appeared very limited.

A steep flight of stairs leads to the upper floor where the interview and counselling rooms are situated (see Picture 3, page 297 & Picture 9, page 300). That there is no disabled access and people with mobility issues are faced with the choice of having to negotiate a flight of stairs or be interviewed in a public space, which further demonstrates the unsuitable nature of this building for working with homeless people. Furthermore, wheelchair access is non-existent due to the narrow doors and cramped conditions within the building.

The volunteer housing advisors spend the majority of their time in the upper-floor office or interview/counselling rooms and homeless people only have access to these areas for booked appointments (see Picture 10, page 301). The general atmosphere on the upper floor is calmer, less claustrophobic and more organised. The interview and counselling rooms contain comfortable furniture and are cleaner and brighter than the rest of the building. However, due to the chronic lack of space items, such as blankets, sleeping bags, household goods etc, are stored in both the interview and counselling rooms (see Picture 11, page 301). This situation causes conflict when items are required for a homeless person at a time when the rooms are in use. In particular I observed an angry exchange when a counselling session was interrupted due to a volunteer requiring access to the room to provide a sleeping bag for a person who was sleeping rough. My thoughts were drawn to the conflict between meeting the immediate physical needs of the homeless, through providing the sleeping bag, at the expense of the long-tem well-being of a homeless person accessing a counselling

session. This example highlights the challenges involved with trying to meet the needs of homeless people with insufficient resources. Both volunteers were attempting to assist homeless people in the best way they felt possible and the angry exchange was arguably driven by frustration at the limitations imposed upon their efforts through exterior pressures: a lack of space, financial resources and homeless policy decisions beyond their control.

The interview room contains a desk with three chairs, a computer terminal for the advisor, phone and a filing cabinet. Space is limited and people who come to an appointment with children or advisors/advocates find the lack of room an issue. Volunteers often agree to look after children while people have an appointment, and while this is a genuine gesture it does raise safety issues, such as what would happen should a child have an accident while in their care, and the competency/training of the volunteers to undertake this role. The interview room feels formal and the white walls and sparse furnishing makes it feel unwelcoming and official. Homeless people I spoke with about this during my observations responded with comments such as:

"It feels like a police interview room to me."

"It would be nicer if it was decorated and a bit brighter, it feels too much like an official thing."

The staff office/workroom is a chaotic space containing three desks housing computer terminals with a narrow space running between them (see Picture 12, page 302). This room is constantly busy and during certain times people often have to hot-desk and struggle for space or access to a computer. I observed volunteers feeling frustrated and agitated by the lack of space and access to resources. In contrast, on quiet days I witnessed the room as empty and not being used at all. Volunteers will often take their lunch or breaks in this room and this can cause a level of friction with advisors who are using the room to input their interview notes. I recorded an exchange of views between two volunteers:

"Look, can you eat outside or something, I am trying to concentrate here!"

"We all have to eat somewhere you know. It is lunch time and if you don't like it then come back later."

Finally, there is an outside yard area that contains a dilapidated smoking shelter, a storage shed, and a small table and three plastic chairs that have seen better days. This area is often in use by people smoking or having a break, and during summer it is not unusual for volunteers to conduct interviews in the yard area, despite the obvious issues around privacy. This outside area appears to be the calmest environment and is a space where the boundaries between homeless people and volunteers appear to be at their least conspicuous. The activity of having a smoke together seems to reduce some of the barriers and tensions apparent within the building and time spent in this area observing and talking to people rewarded me with some interesting insights. For example, the change in the relationship and dynamics between volunteers and homeless people, in regards to communication and body language, was dramatically different when viewed in the building and outside. Volunteers appeared more empathetic and open and homeless people calmer and more relaxed when talking outside. I often heard people discussing issues other than problems around homelessness during my observations:

> "*Yeah, I am going to play some footy with some of the guys I know later, we are crap but probably better than Chorley FC!*"

5.3.2   Chorley United Reform Church

The second site I observed was situated in a church hall building belonging to the URC (see Picture 13, page 302). This site is only a five minute walk away from HtH so is ideally situated to compliment the work done during the day within the office through offering meals to people in need. The church serves meals from 5:30 to 7:30 and closes at 8pm. Chorley URC is a large complex of buildings comprising the main church, two large hall style buildings and peripheral buildings serving the local scouts and other voluntary groups. The main hall stands behind the church and is off the main road. This level of privacy is beneficial for people wishing to access the free meal service without feeling that other people may then know their business and possibly judge them. Homeless people I have talked to who have used this service remarked that the private nature of the building was one of the reasons why they felt they could access this service.

I visited this site on four occasions, at different times and in different weather conditions to try to understand who was using the service and how busy it was. On my first visit the Church, the Reverend accompanied me and explained to the volunteers serving meals who I was and what I was doing. People were polite but didn't appear to be enthusiastic about assisting me with the research, or indeed with my presence. I was told that I could sit and watch and talk to people but I would not be allowed to serve food or be in the kitchen as this area was "*for church members and volunteers only.*" I asked whether homeless people were allowed to volunteer and was informed that at the moment this was a church-based initiative and was being run by a women's group from the church. Meals were prepared off-site by the women of the group and then brought to the church and heated and served on site. The hall is roomy and has a warm and welcoming feel. There is seating for around fifty people with a number of tables, ready laid for people who wish to eat. Menus are on the tables and people are offered a couple of choices of what they would like to eat. Overall the atmosphere is certainly not one of a homeless people's drop-in or soup kitchen; I would describe it as feeling more like a cafe environment.

On my first visit I met with a homeless man who was involved with the research and asked him his thoughts on the project. He responded that:

> "*The food is very nice and it is good that not everyone here is homeless.*"

He appeared at ease and comfortable with the surroundings and we talked for around thirty minutes. At the end of his meal he got up to take his tray to the kitchen and was approached by a church volunteer who insisted on doing this for him. I asked him how he felt about this and he responded that it would be nice if he could at least clear up after himself or wash his pots as thanks for the meal. On a subsequent visit I asked one of the volunteers if it would be possible for people to assist by clearing their own tables or helping to wash up and was told that as a church project the volunteers were responsible for doing these things.

I became slightly uneasy at the lack of opportunity for homeless people to be involved with this project. A friend of mine who has two teenage children knew of HtH and asked would it be possible for the family to help at the supper club. I explained that it was being run by volunteers from the church but that I would enquire. I asked the

Reverend and he agreed that it would be a good opportunity to have people outside of the church involved but that he was unsure *"how the ladies who run it would feel about this."* It was agreed that they could come down and have a look at how the club was run and see if they wished to be involved. The children did attend and made numerous requests to be involved in helping but were turned down by the volunteers. When I enquired why this was the case I was told that it was for health and safety reasons and that there was no-one around to watch the children. My feelings related to this incident, coupled with what I had observed on earlier occasions, was that the church volunteers did not welcome any outside help and that they saw this as their own project being organised through the church. Furthermore, I could not help but feel that this project was based around the notion of paternalism towards people considered as being in need. Although I understand the value in this type of support, my own doubts upon the benefits of undertaking projects that primarily offer a means of amelioration rather than seeking to challenge inequality came to the fore. However, I questioned this with the Reverend and other people at HtH and was informed that the project was at an early stage and the church volunteers had put lots of time and effort into making it work. The response made me feel that I was being seen as causing a problem and should leave the running of this to the church volunteers.

During the course of my observations I recorded that the number of people using the supper club ranged from eighteen to thirty people in an evening. These people included some families with small children and homeless people were in the minority. Although it was to my mind a great opportunity to bring people from different communities together, the opportunity for this appeared to be missed. Most people sat on their own table and very little conversation or interaction occurred between people who had come in separately. The few homeless people that I knew of often arrived, ate and left together and sat at the same table each week. The format remained the same throughout my observations: people would come and sit at a table, choose what they wanted from a short menu and the food would be brought to their table. When they finished eating a church volunteer would collect the plates and take them to the kitchen to be washed. The kitchen finished serving food at 7.30 and the building was closed at 8pm. I felt that the chance to reach out and help homeless people feel part of the wider community was sadly missed and was disappointed that other services to help people were not invited just to be around informally in case

people wished to talk or access support without having to visit an office or be interviewed by someone.

The church Reverend listened to my concerns and proposed to look at what may be done to address some of these at a later date. He also confirmed that the church was open to assisting homeless people in any way it could and that they were welcome to become members of the congregation should they wish. I enquired among a number of homeless people I knew as to why they did not attend the supper club and was surprised when the majority confirmed that they knew it was running but didn't wish to attend as they did not want to be preached at. During my observations I only witnessed one church volunteer overtly suggest joining the church to a homeless person and the atmosphere was largely free of anything that could be construed as pressure to join the church or preaching. However, the perception of religious organisations seeking to pressure homeless people into attending church remained among the homeless people I spoke with.

There was discussion around what should be done should someone behave aggressively or inappropriately at the supper club. A decision was made that church and HtH volunteers would make a rota and attend the supper club to maintain a sense of security. I remember this conversation made me feel uneasy and I question whether the concerns over security would have been raised if there had been no homeless people attending. In addition the volunteers providing 'security' roles were predominantly male, suggesting to me that a level of gender stereotyping was in evidence. During my observations I witnessed one homeless person come into the club after consuming too much alcohol; however he did not behave in a threatening or anti-social manner and left after eating his meal. I noticed a few uneasy looks taking place between church volunteers and was unsure whether this was a sign of concern or judgement over the way homeless people are caricatured as behaving. The general atmosphere, space and warmth of the venue appeared to assist in reducing any anger or stress related issues for people and made me think harder about why the atmosphere at the offices appeared tenser and more stressful than at the church.

5.4   Observing the Organisational Culture

5.4.1   Organisational Structure

As referred to previously, HtH, in common with all organisations, operates upon a set of cultural norms and rules. HtH was founded upon the belief in a Christian duty to help those less fortunate. The people involved, from the board through to the volunteers all appear to genuinely embrace an ethic of care and responsibility for others. However, the organisational structure of the charity is somewhat more diffuse. In theory HtH operates through a hierarchical management system: the Board meet and make the strategic decisions that are then cascaded down to the manager and volunteers. Volunteers are classified through their roles as housing advisors, mediators/counsellors and general/admin duties. Having spent an extensive period of time observing and studying the organisational and inter-relational operation of HtH, I have made the following interpretations:

- HtH operates within a set of silos; there is minimal interaction and exchange of ideas between the various subgroups of volunteers, and little opportunity for volunteers to influence the decisions of the board or the strategy of the organisation.
- There is a sense of a degree of status and power relations between the different volunteer roles. Housing advisors generally have more status and a greater level of control over the day to day operations at HtH.
- Homeless people appear to see volunteers in the role of key workers and friends. There is almost a sense of reluctance on the part of volunteers to 'share' their caseload with others.
- HtH has an atmosphere of an organisation under siege. There is a presupposition that the local Council and other agencies are often in 'competition' for resources or will use HtH as a 'dumping ground' or an information gathering agency, without reciprocating.
- The relationship with the United Reform Church, although arguably in its infancy, appears one of two separate organisations that work loosely together on certain projects. There is little sense that they are combined and a limited sense of solidarity or cohesion.

5.4.2 Time and Structure

Homelessness is often linked to ideas of time and temporality: either through notions that homeless people are in some way fortunate and free of the tyranny of the structures associated with employment and the social norms of domestic life, or through the psychological torture of having to find food and shelter to survive each day while dealing with extended periods of grinding monotony and tedium, of having no security in a sense of ordered structure to life. Time and how it is related to structures, such as HtH as an organisation, formed a strand of my observational interest. ABCD challenges many facets of institutions and the impacts they may have upon weakening individuals and communities (McKnight & Block, 2012). One particular facet of institutions may be defined through the concept of the capture and control of time, time as something to be understood through notions of productivity and schedules/appointments. Through the observations I came to acknowledge the institutional nature of HtH. HtH values its ethos, to stand in relief against statutory organisations and provide care through the form of recognising and respecting the diversity and complexity of individuals.

However, I began to generate a sense of the incongruity between the ethos and the reality of practice. HtH, in common with the majority of organisations, structures its service delivery around time. The building opens at eight-thirty and closes at two-thirty, and the supper club runs at allotted times on allotted days. I observed that homeless people had to plan their lives and daily routines around the structures and times that organisations develop. For example, many homeless people I worked alongside commented that there was a distinct lack of weekend and night services available in Chorley:

> *"Yeah, I can get a brew at a few places during the day, but if it rains at weekend and you get wet well there is nothing doing till Monday."*

This made me question whether HtH was serving the needs of the volunteers and structuring its services on the timetable of the volunteers, in preference to actually moving beyond the norms of the 'domestic' clock and thinking of ways to work with homeless people to develop services covering gaps in local provision. The issue would be one of establishing a team of volunteers able to cover often anti-social working

patterns and without some measure of remuneration, or a greater degree of trust and collaboration with homeless people without which it would be difficult to pursue. In addition some of the volunteers commented that they came to HtH to develop employability skills to help them find a job and perhaps as an organisation HtH has tacitly accepted the ideology of the centrality of work and the need for people to be disciplined by the clock (Foucault, 1994).

5.5   ABCD at HtH: Observational Summary

My observational studies of how ABCD is understood and applied at HtH have led to some complicated findings. Primarily ABCD has not been fully integrated within the organisation in the form of a standard working practice. Volunteers appear to have a wide ranging view of whether or how they should use it and the strengths and weaknesses it may present in practice. One volunteer housing advisor, who saw ABCD in very positive terms, used strength based and appreciative methods with all the homeless people they worked with, for example through removing the questions on substance misuse and other issues related to deficiencies to a later stage in the interview process and beginning with a more positive form of interaction. In contrast others continued to work in the same manner as they had always done with little regard for including these methods within their practice. Homeless people seemed confused with the different approaches taken and on occasion I observed homeless people deciding to make another appointment rather than see someone else if 'their' advisor wasn't available. The reason given was often that 'their' advisor knew their case and worked in a way that they preferred. I thought deeply about this issue and can see how building strong relationships can be positive for homeless people; however, I remained troubled at the replication of the silo mentality, even at the micro level of volunteer-homeless person interaction, and the impact this could have on fostering team working and community building. Drawing back to the theory of the importance of developing social capital and networks as a source of support and opportunity I felt that many of the working practices and strategies undertaken at HtH neglected or reduced the opportunity for homeless people to develop forms of social capital.

Participatory and interaction-based opportunities for homeless people, while certainly improving, remained marginal. I observed that only a small cadre of homeless people who were generally well-acquainted with the organisation and the volunteers constituted the people given the opportunity to be involved with the ABCD project. I am aware that for the project to become established it may be necessary to begin by enlisting homeless people who feel comfortable and have an established relationship with HtH. In spite of this, during an observations stretching over an extended period of time it remains the case that there is an appreciable lack of uptake in new homeless people being represented within the ABCD project, whether this is through reasons attached to homeless people not wishing to become involved or possibly not being presented with the opportunity. Throughout my observations, I detailed the issue that ABCD is premised upon relinquishing control and handing over or sharing the decision making and action to the people who have historically been excluded from participation (McKnight, 2003). In contrast, I observed that the majority of the control and power remained primarily in the hands of the volunteers at both HtH and URC, with little opportunity for homeless people to take ownership of the project.

However, I am conscious that this project has only been in operation for a relatively short period of time. During my period of observation I noted the following as displaying some positive changes in the way HtH operates:

- Three homeless people had become volunteers at HtH and I had seen them attend regularly and enjoy the opportunity and companionship.
- One ex-homeless person had agreed to take a position on the board and was attending meetings to give the views of homeless people.
- Although not fully developed, there did appear the beginnings of a more communal environment and a sense of cooperation and the opportunity for developing teamwork between homeless and non-homeless volunteers.
- I witnessed some of the volunteers using a more strength-based approach to working with homeless people. An example being that some of the advisors were now asking homeless people about their possible strengths and assets, such as previous employment and hobbies, rather than concentrating primarily upon their 'deficiencies' and needs, such as drug or alcohol use or criminal records.

- A network group was established with some of the other charities and representatives from organisations such as the education and business sector. Unfortunately, due to a lack of time and commitment this initiative ceased while I was undertaking the research. However, the experience was valuable and some of the volunteers expressed an interest in revisiting this at a later period.

5.6   Reflections

I wrote in my research diary my feelings at the end of my first observations:

> *"Why does the word research trouble people so much? I am still a volunteer and yet they seem to feel that I am now in some way a threat."*

I remember the initial atmosphere making me wonder whether I would be able to manage the role of participant researcher and if the volunteers would agree to take part in the research. I believe this experience was a very healthy way to begin the research as it forced me to question my role and motives in doing the research and to return and explain my thoughts and take questions from the volunteers. I feel that in doing this the power dynamic between me as a researcher and the feelings of the volunteers as the objects of research was challenged and reduced. In any future projects I have learned that one cannot take for granted that people will trust the motives of the researcher or not be suspicious of what the research is seeking to find. I believe that my existing relationships with people at HtH may have made me overly confident in expecting that people would trust me, and more importantly my motives, because they knew me. I am now more aware that being the member of a community, be it as in this case a volunteer at HtH or for example a member of an ethnic or cultural community, does not by default privilege one to assume a greater level of acceptance and access (Beoku-Betts, 1994).

During the observations I became aware of many things that I had either missed or ignored while volunteering at HtH. The importance and significance of food, not simply as a means of nourishment but as a signifier for need, charity and social control was brought into stark relief. The politics of who is entitled to access the food bank and

under what conditions; what types and how much food should be included in each bag, for example how many days worth and what constitutes an acceptable and varied diet, were issues that I had not perceived in such a critical manner before doing this research. I felt that food was being defined as a resource that homeless people should in some manner 'prove' that they were worthy to receive, rather than as a human right that should be available to all regardless of any definitions of being deserving or worthy. Food demonstrated a concrete manifestation of the dominant thinking around homeless people being in some way complicit in their misfortune and thus it being incumbent upon them to demonstrate their 'need' and 'gratitude' for the services they receive. Linkages can be seen in wider polices around poverty and heath promotion which arguably site the root of the issue in individual failings and behavioural change rather than as a manifestation of structural, political and economic processes (Lang & Caraher, 1998). The exponential growth and use of food banks provides evidence of the impact of political and economic forces upon the poorest members of society (Butler, 2015).

I began to see the obvious state of disrepair within the building, from cracks in the wall to the discoloured paint (see Picture 7, page 299 & Picture 14, page 303). I started to be able to link the atmosphere of the building to the volunteers' moods and to the wider debate about the position and treatment of homeless people, and their services within a social context. For example, the lack of money available to spend on the building in conjunction with the wider context of the lack of resources spent on homelessness at policy level. People who feel marginalised having to make do with under-resourced services being operated by volunteers who describe feeling overwhelmed and undervalued can foster an environment in which meeting individual needs supersedes challenging inequality or unjust power relationships, and positive hopes for change may be stymied.

As my observations progressed it became obvious that two homeless people in particular were now being accepted as volunteers within their own right. While I thought this was a very positive outcome for them I felt that this actually strengthened barriers to other homeless people participating. I perceived a sense of classifying homeless people based upon the volunteers' relationships with them and whether they would 'fit' into pre-existing ways of working. However, the lack of space within

the building limited the opportunities for offering experience to all homeless people, and for the people involved the benefits appeared very positive.

I felt a sense of disappointment that the potential of the supper club was not being realised and had to remind myself that this was not my personal responsibility and that as a researcher it was my job to examine and report the issues and not try and 'fix' them all. I did pass on my findings to the Reverend who welcomed them and has agreed to look at areas for improving working practices and opportunities for involving homeless people. However, he did comment that the church is an organisation with its own set of norms and a way of doing things and that he had to remain mindful of what the church volunteers wished to do. I will return to my personal conflict around the roles and identities of researcher and activist within the research conclusion and reflections section.

The observations provided me with the opportunity to examine HtH from a different perspective and to remain critical. As a volunteer I share the responsibility for how HtH operates, and as such the comments I make are as much a source of self-critique as a reflection of the work of the volunteers at HtH. To deepen the analysis I needed to get the thoughts and opinions of all the volunteers and a cross section of homeless people, including those who did not wish to, or could not, access the ABCD project. To accomplish this I undertook a series of interviews with both volunteers and homeless people at HtH. In the following chapter the findings from the interviews will be reported upon and explored, through referring to and incorporating observational data where applicable.

CHAPTER 6: ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF HOMELESS PEOPLE, VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF AT HELP THE HOMELESS

6.1   Introduction and Definitions

6.1.1   Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the experiences of homeless people, volunteers and staff who have participated in developing a food distribution project based upon the principles of Asset-Based Community Development. The views expressed are taken from interviews and through an extended period of participatory observations. The transcripts were analysed on computer using processes inspired by Attride-Stirling (2001) (see Chapter 4 for an account of this process). The chapter will discuss the themes that have been identified through the research and conclude by developing a summary of the findings and a reflection on the views of the people who participated in regard to the possible strengths and weaknesses of ABCD.

6.1.2   Interview Key

To respect and protect the identities of the people interviewed the following key is used to denote the speakers involvement with HtH. Initially numbers were assigned as an aid to tracking multiple comments made by participants. However, due to the small number of participants and requests by participants to ensure their anonymity as far as possible, it was agreed that a simplified code would be used throughout:

HP – Homeless Person
V – Volunteer worker
S – Paid member of staff

6.2   The Experience of Homelessness

The first overarching theme to emerge from the interview data was the experience of homelessness. Within this, participants highlighted the importance of their stories being heard, revealed a strong sense of loss, and identified a tension between conceptualisations of homeless people as victims or instigators of their condition.

Chapter 2 presented the view that homelessness is a complex issue that is often presented through a reductive position as relating to people who have no access to suitable housing at a certain period in time. People interviewed felt that how homelessness was perceived and experienced was central to the debate. Due to the complexity and difficulty in defining homelessness in a manner that encapsulates the reality of those experiencing it and for those working with the homeless, this chapter will begin by examining what homelessness means, and how it is experienced and understood through the interview data provided by homeless people, volunteers and staff at HtH.

6.2.1   Homelessness Narratives: Being Heard

During the research homeless people who participated wanted their stories to be heard, and the majority of those interviewed wished to talk about how they became homeless and how they experienced the everyday reality of homelessness. The sharing of stories represents one of the most fundamental bonds of humanity and is a key facet in working in a truly participatory way (Ledwith, 2016). Although over the course of our dialogue we shared many stories and some were constructed around hope or humour, homeless narratives were primarily recounted as negative and often painful experiences:

> HP: *"I was dealt a crap hand in life... I worked at B&Q but had a bad accident when a lifter fell on me. When I went back they told me I couldn't work anymore... I said what about the shop floor or anything? But they said no and pensioned me off. That screwed me up big time. Middle aged guy, no work, knackered health and I was already into the gambling and had burned most of my bridges with friends and family. You hit the bottom and end up on the streets. Then you start... it will get better tomorrow, it will get better tomorrow [long pause] but it doesn't."*

This homeless man expressed a sense of impotence at how he came to be in his situation: the accident and the loss of employment. A feeling of being discarded comes across strongly through the reference to middle age and poor health and a feeling of defeat and acceptance of his condition. In common with other homeless people interviewed, he expressed a feeling of hopelessness that the situation will not improve. Throughout the interviews he displayed a need to regress and explain how his whole life has been one of problems and misfortunes that ultimately led him to homelessness. His comments highlighted a sense of his need to understand the experience of homelessness as a product of, to use his term, *"being dealt a crap hand in life."* Freire's (2006) notion of conscientisation, or the process by which people become of the forces of hegemony and social, political injustices that shape their lives theorises that there are three levels of consciousness:

> *'Magical consciousness refers to the level at which people are passive and unquestioning about the injustices in their lives. The harshness of their lives tends to be passively accepted, and explanations are often based on fatalism... Naive consciousness involves a degree of insight into the nature of individual problems, but does not connect these with structural discrimination. At this level of consciousness people are likely to blame themselves, and say, for example, that they are not clever enough, or they should have worked harder...This individualisation of problems lends itself to the hegemonic blaming of victims, which is so much part of the market economy ideology. Critical consciousness is the stage at which connections are made with the way in which the structures of society discriminate, reaching into people's being , shaping their lives in prejudiced ways'* (Ledwith, 2012, p.100).

It emerged that many of the homeless people expressed their reactions to and understandings of homelessness through reference to the operation of magical consciousness. When discussing homelessness as an issue, both volunteers and homeless people appeared to express their views through the lens of a naive consciousness, with much of the blame being attached to individuals and their behaviours. Homelessness is seen as the outcome of a long history of issues, some of which individuals may have a measure of control over but others that are beyond an individual's agency. Freire's (2006) theory of conscientisation provides a valuable

reference point for understanding the views people express and challenging through a process of problematisation and conscientisation.

> HP: *"I got myself into a lot of debt... Didn't pay my rent or bills and was evicted. A lot of it was probably my fault, but I couldn't cope. I had a bit of a past and had been in trouble a few times and fines and stuff from court just made things worse. Stupid really, I couldn't pay my bills and they would give me more fines for not paying my fines! What could I do but rob to get some money and just keep making the whole thing worse. I can't get a job with my record and no landlord is going to want to house me either. So I just drift in and out of homelessness and prison...no-one seems to have any answers to help me and I reckon I will just keep on living like this until I die."*

This interview highlights the common need for the homeless people interviewed to situate their experiences within their wider biographies. They demonstrate a desire to explore their life experiences and understand or justify the reasons why they are homeless. The above excerpt describes homelessness in terms of being a cycle or being caught in a downward spiral (Thompson et al, 2004). The notion of homelessness as being 'trapped' in a process that was beyond the limits of an individual's control ran concurrently through the majority of the interviews. To return to the idea of homelessness as comparable to the theory of the shock doctrine (Klein, 2008), during the interviews a definable split emerged between homeless people who felt that they had a responsibility to resolve their issues through accessing education and training to seek an economic solution, and those who appeared lost and bereft of a sense of identity or purpose. Homeless people who 'accepted' the shock of homelessness as an opportunity to change, through embracing interventions premised upon employability, appeared to receive better services and outcomes than those who could not conform to the demands of a free market society. Although homelessness was being experienced as an individual issue there appeared a consensus of feeling that the root causes of homelessness were more complex and were often felt to go beyond an individual's sole responsibility. The interview findings may demonstrate that the homeless people interviewed articulate homelessness as a process involving both individual and structural processes (Clapham, 2003). Conflicting thoughts and feelings of both a sense of structural injustice and individual responsibility ran throughout the

interviews and brought vividly into the spotlight the benefit of working with people using a Freirean approach in challenging hegemony and exploring possible alternative narratives to the dominant neo-liberal conceptualisation of the individual within the free market society.

6.2.2   A Sense of Loss

The majority of the homeless people interviewed shared the view that homelessness had impacted negatively upon them in some manner. Homelessness was rarely defined through notions of constituting a liberating experience. Being homeless was not felt to offer romantic notions of freedom from constricting social norms. The respondents' feelings of loss and rejection suggest a sense that the stigma of homelessness acted in ways that marginalised, excluded and dehumanised them:

> HP: *"I feel ashamed at being on the streets and I hate the way that people look at me with pity and disgust, like I am mad or ill or something."*

> HP: *"Being on the streets isn't any good for anyone; no-one wants to know you and you lose respect for yourself."*

These views directly challenge the view expressed, primarily in American homelessness literature, that homelessness may be defined as 'romantic' or an act of rebellion that provides the individual with a sense of freedom from social norms and responsibilities (Widmer, 1965; Miller, 1991). In the UK, popular media channels have created the idea of the 'welfare scrounger' or 'benefit cheat' and homeless people by default are often perceived through notions of such stereotypes (Tyler, 2013). This again demonstrates the power of the media in forwarding neo-liberal ideology and making it appear as the 'natural order'.

The experience of being homeless was recent for all those interviewed and as such it is arguable that the comments made will not have been mitigated by a period of time during which the homelessness has been 'overcome' and may have been reframed in light of a past period of 'bad luck' or 'misfortune'. One homeless person who had gained access to accommodation while the research was ongoing described their feelings as experiencing a sense of temporary respite that was destined to be taken away from them:

HP: *"I reckon I am probably always going to feel, you know, like when does this all get taken away then? Things never seem to last or go well for me for any length of time."*

6.2.3   As Victims or Instigators?

Volunteers and staff interviewed provided a wide range of views on homelessness, and how they considered it as an issue for those experiencing it. However, in contrast to the more complex understanding of the issue for homeless people the views of volunteers could be broadly split between seeing homelessness as a personal or a structural issue, rather than situating it in more complex terms (Ravenhill, 2008; Somerville, 2013). How volunteers and staff understand and construct a homelessness narrative is important; establishing commonalities and highlighting the things that unite people towards achieving a common goal is a fundamental factor in developing ABCD. Among the volunteers and staff interviewed individuals who had experienced homelessness generally provided a more nuanced view than colleagues who had no personal experience of homelessness:

V: *"I have been homeless in the past and it is something I can associate with... Many things are just out of your hands and it is bad enough that you blame yourself without other people seeing homelessness as your fault. For most homeless people it is just circumstances and bad luck that they are the victims of."*

However, views and perceptions of homelessness from volunteers interviewed who had no personal experience of being homeless primarily identified homelessness through a combination of cultural or individual ideologies:

V: *"I think that sometimes people are, are... they get trapped in a culture, in, in a way of living, and if they have never known anything else then, then, they are going to continue doing what they do."*

V: *"Well I do think that people have to take responsibility and if they are drinking or wasting their money then, err, there is a sense that they are homeless through their actions and choice."*

> V: *"Some people we work with have been genuinely unfortunate and don't deserve it, but others are really to blame for their situations."*

The range of views and explanations for homelessness provided from this small group of people who work and use the services of HtH bring into focus how these views are formed and transmitted. The continuing dominance of the binary positions of individual or structural causes of homelessness, despite challenges from contemporary theories, demonstrates how certain types of knowledge can take on a hegemonic form (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) that are difficult to challenge, as they become what may be described as 'common wisdom'. Crotty (2009) contends that:

> *'We tend to take "the sense we make of things" to be "the way things are". We blithely do that and, just as blithely hand on our understandings as quite simply "the truth". Understandings transmitted in this way and gaining a place in our view of the world take deep root and we find ourselves victims of the "tyranny of the familiar"'* (Crotty, 2009, p.59).

For those involved with working in the homeless sector the 'tyranny of the familiar' may be the 'common wisdom' that while some homeless people are genuine victims of circumstance some are the authors of, and therefore responsible for, their own predicament:

> V: *"Most of the homeless people we see are in real and genuine need. Whatever they may have done or, or no matter how they have ended up homeless we are here to help. However, some of the people we see are their own worst enemies and, err, sometimes you have to wonder if, if they want to be housed."*

The idea of deserving and undeserving people (Wright, 1988; Beito, 1993; Sales, 2002) as illustrated by the above quote and through the split between those experiencing homelessness through individual failings as against those facing structural issues was repeatedly voiced throughout the research:

> HP: *"I mean most homeless people I know have something about them that makes them fuck up no matter what help they get. Like, you go to the council and they say ok we will help you, here is a place and you get your benefits to pay for*

stuff. Ok, the deal is you help yourself and we will help you, but we just can't do it. Maybe people should only get one chance and then have to get on with it..."

The above quote from a homeless person suggests that amongst people who are homeless there are competing notions of whether homelessness is a condition of individual behaviour or psychology. However it could be that homeless people are expressing and mirroring what they see as the dominant social view of homeless people. The idea of the 'tyranny of the familiar' highlights the operation of the processes involved in hegemony. Hegemony reaches from the macro level of society, where it is arguably created, and filters down to the very micro level of a sense of an almost apologetic acceptance by those it was constructed to exclude and exploit: for example, the homeless volunteer worker who sets out with the noble intentions of doing something to help homeless people and yet begins, possibly unknowingly, to deploy the language of oppression towards homeless people and view them as subjects or in many cases deviant and personally responsible for their plight. The homeless people themselves then apparently become involved in the Darwinian struggle for survival by operating their own form of social abjection (Tyler, 2013) within and amongst homeless groups: the alcoholic is seen as beyond help by the abstainer and in turn may demonise the drug addict. Many of the homeless people in the research demonstrate the power of hegemony in turning the oppressed into the oppressor (Freire, 2006) by using their, however limited, forms of agency and power both to denigrate themselves, through accepting they are 'flawed' and 'failed', and to justify their humanity by reducing those they deem 'lesser' to objects of scorn.

ABCD treats relationships as assets or forms of social capital (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Understanding that homeless people may have a damaged sense of self and identity is an important first step in building relationships upon which collaborative working becomes a possibility. A sense of identity is essential for building and maintaining healthy relationships. The next section will examine how homelessness may negatively impact upon identity and how this can link into a poor sense of coherence that may damage people's levels of health and well-being.

6.3   Homelessness and Identity

Identity and how it is constructed, managed and can ultimately be damaged or lost formed a key theme within the interviews. Under the broad notion of identity themes around coherence, denial and othering and a sense homeless people's identity being linked to perceptions of being categorised as deserving or undeserving were identified. In addition, identity played a prominent role in how volunteers perceived their work and relationships with fellow volunteers and homeless people. The interplay between institutionalisation and identity was highlighted through the interviews with homeless people.

6.3.1   Coherence and Loss

Homeless people linked their experiences of being homeless to a loss of identity. They suggested that their sense of who they were and how they were perceived by others had become problematic. In some cases homelessness was felt to have led to people experiencing what Erving Goffman (1963) described as a spoiled identity:

> HP: *"Feeling like a bit of shit from someone's shoe can bring people, anybody, to be like me."*

> HP: *"You don't know just what a big part of you your home is until you lose it. I feel like nothing now... no point to the days and I don't really know who I am now, just another homeless person... one of life's losers."*

> HP: *"It's about how people see you... When you are homeless you are seen as being thick, dirty and a druggy or alcoholic. It gets hard to try and remember that I had a job and a life before this and with the way I get treated by people in the street I sometimes think that they must be right and this is me".*

Homelessness can be a traumatic experience that may have negative impacts upon a person, psychologically as well as physically. Homeless people may feel powerless and impotent in the face of their issues and suffer a loss of a sense of coherence. Antonovsky (1993) defines the conditions for a sense of coherence as:

> *'A global orientation that expresses the extent to which one has a pervasive, enduring though dynamic feeling of confidence that (1) the stimuli deriving from*

one's external and internal environments in the course of living are structured,
predictable and explicable; (2) the resources are available to one to meet the
demands posed by these stimuli; and (3) these demands are challenges, worthy
of investment and engagement' (Antonovsky, 1993, p. 725).

Homelessness, arguably, damages an individual's sense of coherence through the process of being unpredictable and often the product of external forces over which one has little control; homeless people suffer from a lack of resources to meet the demands of homelessness and the challenge of accessing housing and rebuilding one's life may appear insurmountable. Contemporary studies explore the issues of developing and maintaining a sense of a 'healthy' identity within the modern milieu of globalisation and capitalism (Baumeister, 1986; Gergen, 1991; Castells, 1997; Moran, 2015). Alongside the challenge to a sense of coherence, homeless people may face psychological issues in maintaining a sense of identity when so much has been stripped away from their life: the loss not just of shelter and economic resources but of relationships, self-esteem and arguably a loss of agency.

6.3.2   Denial and Othering

Farrington and Robinson (1999) studied how homeless people maintain their identities. Their findings suggest that for the recent or short-term homeless a strategy of denial is often deployed; people will actively resist the label of homeless and will see their situation as a temporary problem that they will resolve without recourse to outside assistance. However, an increasing level of identification with homelessness was evident among those who had been homeless for a more extensive period of time. Strategies for identity maintenance among these groups broadly consisted of either demonstrating an individual positive signifier within the homeless group, such as being more capable of supporting oneself than other homeless people, or not drinking alcohol and therefore being able to demonstrate a difference from the stigmatised group:

> HP: *"I keep myself clean and presentable and don't mix with them. I will get a job and be back on my feet soon."*

Many of the interview statements, such as the ones below, offered descriptions of why these homeless people are now making steps to improve their circumstances while

criticising the negative behaviours and values of other homeless people, perhaps through a process of the acceptance of and a disassociation with a negative stereotype of homeless people.

> HP: *"Staying with friends or in a B&B or where you are not really wanted makes you feel like crap. I am a grown man and look at what I have got to show for my life. You feel lower than low. There is working class and lower class and, err, I am lower than that. But at least I am not like those lot who do drugs and crimes, those lot are the lowest and don't deserve any help I reckon."*

> HP: *"I think most people think I am useless and a joke. Fair enough, I suppose lots of homeless people are a waste of time. I am trying to make a change and just need a lucky break."*

Conversely, identity may be constructed through focussing upon a positive group characteristic, such as the notion that homeless people constitute a community that cares for and shares resources with each other. This research was primarily conducted with longer-term homeless people and it would appear that another mode of identity maintenance could be identified as accepting the position and stigma of homelessness, possibly as a pre-emptive measure to deflect from the external criticism of others. Perhaps the self-depreciation demonstrated could be seen as a means of eliciting sympathy and seeking to form alliances through disclosure (Kyle, 2005). A homeless person I was packing food with during my observations commented on his personal hygiene:

> HP: *"I know I smell bad and should take better care of myself really, but I know that people at HtH are around for me."*

I felt a sense of embarrassment and unease that someone should feel the need to disclose something personal like this to me and perceived that the comment was made as a gesture to seek my support and demonstrate gratitude. Comments such as these increased my awareness and understanding of the necessity for continuing to learn and implement a Freirean approach in my practice. Homeless people were providing the necessary environment for exploring generative themes and problematising homelessness as a means of moving beyond the simplistic and negative forms of individual blame.

Caution should be exercised in making any firm judgements around these findings as the group interviewed had demonstrated a desire to change their circumstances, through their volunteering to take part in the ABCD project. Some of those interviewed suggested that they now felt more aligned with the other volunteers rather than with homeless people. I felt uneasy in that I sensed that some of the homeless people who had volunteered were presenting negative views of other homeless people as a means of distancing themselves from being associated with their perception of society's generally negative images of homeless people.

6.3.3   The Deserving and Undeserving Homeless

Amongst the homeless people interviewed, there was a strongly held view that some people were more deserving of assistance than others:

> HP: *"...look you have to put something back when people are trying to help you out. Otherwise the help should go to other people. I am willing to help myself get my life sorted but if some of them others just want to keep drinking and begging then they don't deserve help."*

> HP: *"Some people who are homeless just take the piss and to be honest you shouldn't be helping them. They are never going to sort themselves out while you keep giving them handouts. Help should go to us who are trying and they should do the same thing."*

Such views, expressed at the individual or micro level closely mirror those often found at the meso, comprising statutory homeless support and other homeless organisations, and the macro or institutional/policy based levels. That homeless people should strongly express these views demonstrates the power of ideologies as they become entrenched within societies and take on the form of possibly hegemonic social norms. Research by Phelan et al (1997) argued that the label 'homeless person' was as stigmatizing as being hospitalised with a mental health condition and that the tendency to blame homeless people for their predicament remains constant. These views were explored with homeless people in an effort to discover whether they were internalised or being deployed as a strategy to elicit support from volunteers and staff for improving their own circumstances by classifying themselves as 'deserving' homeless people. The evidence gained from this small group of homeless people

suggests that the views expressed, and supported by the observational data (see Chapter 5), were genuinely held rather than constituting a means of simply gaining any material advantage.

The majority of the homeless people, volunteers and staff interviewed suggested that people who were 'trying' to help themselves deserved more support. The issue of who deserved access to resources appeared a constant theme. However, among homeless people interviewed there appeared an underlying belief that resources should be limited to and targeted on people who resided in the local area of Chorley and districts. They suggested that homeless people from outside the area did not deserve or should not be entitled to support. Comments relating to 'outsiders' were explored in an effort to understand the nature of such beliefs:

> HP: *"People come here from other areas and we don't have enough places of our own. It is wrong when local lads get sent to Blackburn hostels when people from outside are living in hostels here."*

A minority of homeless people interviewed made comments that may be construed as racist in nature:

> HP: *"I was born and raised in Chorley and am sick of other people getting support who don't deserve it. Do you know there is a family of Romanian gypsies who have got a place and are selling* The Big Issue *in town? What about those of us born here and trying to get on? We deserve the help first."*

When asked for further clarification the response often contained a denial of any racist intent and an opinion suggesting that these homeless people saw themselves as forgotten and rejected by service providers. They expressed the perception that people they considered as 'newcomers' or 'outsiders' were receiving better treatment and access to services. Upon further investigation it became apparent that the notion of someone being an 'outsider' and gaining unfair access to resources applied equally to homeless people coming into the area from neighbouring towns and cities. Homeless people's notions of community appeared based around belonging to a place and could be perceived as insular and exclusionary. Such sentiments add evidence to the low levels of solidarity reported between the homeless people interviewed who experience the same forms of marginalisation and oppression. Some of the comments

reflected Freire's (2006) observations that people damaged through forms of oppression will often take on and manifest the mantle of the oppressor as a result. This demonstrates the need for developing critical consciousness as the means for the process of empowerment. Through this process it is argued that: *'colonised identities are liberated, leading to personal autonomy and this, in turn, leads to collective autonomy and the energy to act together for change for a better world'* (Ledwith, 2016, p.151). In this way it is important to recognise the complexity inherent within relationships of oppression and seek to liberate both the oppressed and the oppressor from the cycle it generates.

6.3.4   Volunteering and Identity Creation/Affirmation

The notion of identity was a theme raised by many of the volunteers engaged with the project. A common theme found running through the volunteer interviews was one of pride and attachment to the identity of being a volunteer working with homeless people:

> V: *"I volunteer because I like to make a difference to people and do my bit to try and make the world a better place. I enjoy it and get lots from it... I like going home and thinking I have done some good for someone. I am proud of what we achieve and think we do some very good work and I would have an empty space if I didn't volunteer here."*

> V: *"Yeah, err, I suppose it is I want to help people and to show that I am doing my bit for society. I am also unemployed and have older kids myself and have been through the mill... For my health, err I suffer with chronic depression and like to keep myself busy, working and keeping busy makes me feel better so that's why... err I have always, have always been, done volunteer work..."*

During the interviews the volunteers highlighted the pride and sense of solidarity at being volunteers at HtH. They expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the work they did and a feeling of belonging to a group of people and an organisation that they felt accomplished a social good.

6.3.5   Institutionalisation

Challenging the nature of institutions and institutionalisation is a fundamental component within the theory of ABCD; therefore, an objective of the research was to examine barriers to participation for homeless people and experiences and perceptions around institutionalisation may assist in highlighting such issues. A number of the homeless people interviewed had experienced some form of institutional environment during their lives. While one cannot generalise that all people who experience some form of institutionalisation may experience homelessness research suggests that there is the case for examining a causal link (Koegel, Melamid & Burnham, 1995; Khan, 2010). Institutionalisation, taking the form of prison, youth offending centres or care was expressed as a link to homelessness in the narratives of four homeless people interviewed. It must be remembered that it is not just the time spent within an institutional setting that is important but also the impact the experience has upon a person's self of self or identity. Foucault (1995) explored the means by which the process of institutionalisation strips away an individual's sense of self and replaces it with the identity of patient or inmate, for example. With this in mind the responses suggest that the feelings engendered through institutionalisation should be considered rather than simply institutionalisation per se.

> HP: *"I was in care cos my mum couldn't cope and gave me up. I reckon this was part of why I became a bad lad and ended up homeless."*

> HP: *"I was born with cerebral palsy and learning problems and was sent to a special school. I was put into care and abused by people while in there. I started on drink and drugs dead young and did some robbing and crimes. No-one wanted me so I think I don't want them either and that is why I keep doing what I do and am homeless like."*

The quotes suggest a feeling of a link between the experience of institutionalisation and the outcome of homelessness for the respondents. Their particular experiences of institutionalisation rather than institutions themselves emerged through the interviews:

> HP: *"I made some good friends in care and some of the people who looked after us were nice. Not everything was bad, but I don't think they help enough when you leave. You know, I couldn't look after myself properly."*

Some of the homeless people had experienced quite severe mental health issues and spent time in hospital. A comment made suggested that sometimes it would be preferable to remain within an institutional environment:

> HP: *"I have bad depression and should be in hospital. I know I am not well and they should let me go back and stay inside for a while but they keep sending me back out. Not enough money I suppose."*

Findings from international studies suggest there is a strong link between young people leaving care and rates of homelessness and interactions with the criminal justice system (Biehal et al, 1994; Tweddle, 2007). A report by Homeless Link (2011) demonstrated the cycle of offending, homelessness and re-offending:

> *'Homelessness and re-offending have a complex link where, for many individuals, each is both a cause and a result of the other. Among people who are homeless there is a vast over-representation of offending backgrounds. Over 75% homelessness services in England support clients who are prison leavers... One in five clients using homelessness services has links with the probation service. In turn, homelessness increases the chances of re-offending. Ex-prisoners who are homeless upon release are twice as likely to re-offend as those with stable accommodation'* (Homeless Link, 2011, p.5).

However, deinstitutionalisation may be an equally relevant factor in the causation of homelessness. For example, many young people leaving care may find themselves without access to the family, kin and peer support networks available to others (Hutson & Liddiard, 1994; Fitzpatrick, 2000; Ford et al 2002; Lepper, 2011). A counter argument that young people leaving care may experience more positive housing related outcomes, due to support from social and related services, than young people without such support should be considered (Simon, 2008). Young people who have experienced institutionalisation may find themselves having to adjust to the realities of living alone and maintaining a property at a time when many of their peers are still living at home with parents and family. A similar case could be argued for those who

have spent a long period in institutions ranging from hospitals, prisons or the armed forces. One person's feelings and experiences of leaving the armed services demonstrate this point:

> HP: *"The army gave me lots of skills that I have drawn on to get by and to be honest it has probably helped me keep going and sort myself out. The biggest problem though was when I first came out. They gave me loads of help and that but I just didn't know what to do with myself, and having no close family I couldn't cope to well without the structure of army life."*

Volunteers expressed their views concerning homeless people who had left institutional settings:

> V: *"Ex-offenders are the hardest people to work with. When they have been to prison for any length of time then in my experience they are just going to keep on going back."*

> V: *"Hospitals should not keep putting mentally ill people back on the street and say that they have social rather than medical problems. When they have issues with mental health then they need to be in hospital and not on the streets."*

The views expressed suggest that volunteers saw institutional settings in complex ways. One may be that ex-prisoners become 'institutionalised' in prison and are destined to fail when released. Mental health services were often considered as trying to use homelessness as a means of placing the responsibility onto social and housing services. Many of the comments and discussion I had with volunteers made me think back to the issues around deinstitutionalisation and community that emerged around the Community Care Act 1990 (Seal, 2005). The notion that the community is capable, or willing, to accommodate and care for people who have experienced, often prolonged and negative periods of institutionalisation for many of the participants appeared to remain contested terrain:

> *'The concept of deinstitutionalisation was predicated on an optimistic belief in the compassionate capacity of the community...'* (Daly, 1996, p. 121).

Institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation arguably impact upon a person's sense of identity and belonging (Ravenhill, 2008). To implement ABCD in a way that may

support people to achieve the change they wish requires establishing networks and developing relationships and a sense of community. One of the areas of key interest for this research was the question of whether a community of the homeless exists, and if so what are the positive and negative aspects of such a community. If homeless people are excluded and marginalised from society, then is it possible to strengthen links between the communities of the homed and homeless? The following section will discuss how participants thought about community and belonging and how these issues related to being involved with ABCD.

6.4   *Community and Belonging*

HtH defines itself as a community organisation, embedded in and serving the local community of Chorley. However, as previously discussed in Chapter 3 on the nature of community, the idea and nature of community is contested and holds a myriad of meanings. Community building and involvement are key aspects for implementing ABCD and the participants expressed a range of complex understandings and experiences of community at varying levels.

6.4.1   *Homelessness as Community Exile*

Homelessness is generally a process that fosters exclusion from wider society, and homeless people may be defined as living outside of the majority norms that constitute community relationships (McDonagh, 2011). At the extreme, homeless people may be labelled as diseased, degenerate and criminal, and policies are developed to further exclude and restrict the access of homeless people from 'acceptable' society (Waldron, 2000; Amster, 2003). In response to the exclusionary nature of homelessness, homeless people may form homeless communities for a number of reasons, for example: as means of resistance, solidarity, access to resources and information and security. The nature and experience of community for homeless people was explored through interviews and observations with homeless people. The majority of homeless people interviewed responded with the view that community was something that they were disconnected from and that to re-engage with community would require being housed and altering their way of life:

> HP: *"Yeah, community for me is about being like everyone else. You know, having a house and a job and a family, being able to do normal stuff. When you don't have these things you don't belong, not really. People ask 'what do you do for work?' and err, what can I say, 'I am homeless and unemployed?' See, this is why you need a job and a house to be part of a community, cos otherwise you don't have any part in it."*

> HP: *"I'm an addict and probably won't ever change. I blew it with my family and girlfriend and even with my kid. I reckon family and that is community, but you got to be a stable person to be part of all that stuff. The people I know can't hack it and that is why we are homeless. I am not whining because most of it is my fault and if I want to keep on doing the drugs and shit then that is my choice. Normal life ain't for everyone anyway and I am better this way I reckon."*

The quotes suggest a disconnect from community: one person feels excluded through the status of being homeless whist the other offers a sense of choosing to disengage from community. The notion of choice is complicated as one may read the second quote and take it literally that this person is to blame for their actions and is actively choosing to continue with their lifestyle. However, how much of our choice is truly free and independently made? Perhaps the addiction limits the access to choosing another way to live and the response is to portray this as an act of agency. Research suggests that while homeless people do maintain a level of agency homelessness is not generally a 'choice' that one can make (Parsell & Parsell, 2012).

6.4.2   Homelessness as Community?

Building and strengthening communities is an essential aim of ABCD. Communities are perceived as the being at the heart of creating opportunities for positive change. The nature of community and how it is interpreted by homeless people emerged as a key theme of the research. The notion of the existence of or the belonging to a 'homeless community' was contentious with a polarity of views expressed by homeless respondents:

> HP: *"I would say we look out for each other mostly. Not everyone, some people are just bad and take stuff and that, but mostly we help each other out with food*

and cigs like. You can see us all here [at HtH supper club] getting along and that. Yeah, I would say we are friends and a community".

HP: *"When you are homeless all you have is other people in the same boat. You get to understand that it doesn't matter where someone has come from or whether they drink or how old they are... This can happen to anyone and you have to start to look out for each other just to get by. You know, someone will tell you where you can get some food or some clothes and maybe where is a good place to sleep."*

The above quotes demonstrate that homeless people defined community in an instrumental and relational sense. Community was primarily perceived as a means for sharing resources and protection. However, there was also a sense of solidarity being created out of conditions of adversity, that these particular people considered that their homelessness created a commonality and a need to help each other. In comparison to these views the majority of homeless people interviewed rejected the view that homeless people they knew formed a community or shared common interests:

HP: *"No way, they will take the shirt off your back if you let them. Shit, I lost about twenty quid in a hostel, someone robbed it. People will do what they need to get what they want and that is just how it is. People see homeless people as all the same and this is crap. I am not the same as some druggy or someone who sleeps with people for money. Half the* Issue *sellers and beggars I know are not even homeless! I would say you got some like me who are trying to get on our feet and then you got the druggies, the drinkers, the ones who are just always going to be homeless and people with mental issues."*

The quote above represents the view that homeless people remain individuals and that homelessness reduces people to a state of fighting for resources in an effort to get by. A sense of anger at being homeless was expressed in many of the interviews and this anger often appeared to take the form of being displaced against other homeless people.

HP: *"I am not your normal homeless person. I had a bad patch and have slept in my car for nearly a year while I get things together. No offence but in my view it*

is about helping yourself to get back on your feet and most of the homeless people I have met don't do this. The homeless people who hang around together seem to do it because they are all like winos or taking drugs and begging as a group. I don't see that as a community and I think it is wrong."

HP: *"I suppose we are all homeless but I don't want to be seen as the same as a lot of them. I mean some people who come in a kick off and cause trouble [the respondent gestures to another homeless person at the supper club who is an agitated state while making the gesture of drinking with a hand to mouth motion]. I have nothing in common with that and I think most people see homeless people as acting like that and it is wrong."*

Some of the homeless respondents appeared to be actively rejecting the label of homeless and identifying it with people who deserved their position through individual faults, such as drinking and taking drugs. They expressed a need to be seen as different from their perceptions of homeless people and expressed their views that if a 'homeless community' existed it was based upon a culture of drink and drug use. Quotes such as the one above suggest that some homeless people use a form of 'categorical distancing' to define their identity in opposition to the perceived cultural norms of homeless people (Snow & Anderson, 1987). Ravenhill (2008) highlights the fact that the notion of a 'homeless community' receives little coverage within British homelessness literature. She suggests that this may be in part because organisations seeking to end homelessness do not wish to promote something that they feel may conflict with this aim, or that it is preferable that homeless people are perceived as lonely, vulnerable and isolated, possibly in order to raise public sympathy and funding. She also discusses the existence of a 'culture of homelessness'. A 'culture of homelessness' is a contentious issue that may be linked to constituting homelessness as a product of individual and group deviancy (Merton, 1968). The negative connotations around a culture of homelessness are arguably something that the homeless people interviewed perceived and sought to disassociate themselves from.

One long-term street homeless person accepted housing through the mental health organisation MIND. He expressed the view that placing people together based upon their specifically defined needs, such as support with mental health issues was of negative value and did little to foster a sense of community or belonging:

HP: *"Err, trouble with MIND is it is full of crazy fuckers, err sorry. Err, people with all kinds of mental issues and drugs and drink problems. Now, I don't want to sound off, err. But, yeah, I was homeless, a gambler and I would say with some mental problems. But I am no junkie or alky and I am not a bad person. Why have I got to have some problem or join some group to get a place anyway? Some of this lot... well I have been in prison with better people. I couldn't take it, no way."*

Opinions such as the one stated above demonstrate the operation of hegemony throughout all levels of society. This person has clearly taken on the false belief that all members of certain groups can be stereotyped through a certain type of behaviour or stigma. Freire's oppressor and oppressed relationship is very strongly represented by the way in which this homeless person degrades a group of people who are identified as being in some way inferior in status. The ideology of competition and the need to hold on to a measure of self worth through denigrating an 'out group' is a key component of maintaining the neo-liberal ideology, and an essential tool for maintaining control over those who are the greatest victims of neo-liberal economic policy. Here we see the importance of raising consciousness to see the world as having other possibilities and avenues for cooperation and fellowship, rather than as one based only upon competition and struggle.

Belonging to a 'homeless community' can offer a sense of belonging and friendship for some people, a sense of shared experience and identity and perhaps strengthen a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1993). However, it may be related to the use of drugs and alcohol and perceived by many in homeless services as a negative influence that holds many homeless people back from accessing pathways to rejoining the 'homed' (Seal, 2005). Volunteers expressed mixed views as to the benefits and negative aspects of a 'homeless community':

V: *"Sometimes homeless people being together is, err, it may be unhealthy. I mean someone may begin to drink and get into things that are not helpful. I think that the people who use [a local private hostel primarily for homeless people] become used to being around people who drink and use drugs and this may, this to me may bring them down."*

V: *"Now, I can understand why people stick together and can see the benefits of doing this. I am sure that I would stick together with other people if I was homeless. The difficulty comes when I have managed to find accommodation for someone and they then decide that they want to stay with the group. I have been frustrated when people give up perfectly good tenancies because they want to be back with other homeless people, it's a problem."*

The issue of homeless people and community raises a problem for ABCD in that community is often valorised as a common good that needs to be promoted and strengthened. However, little has been said about communities that may not share the same norms as the majority community and some of whose actions, such as drinking and living on the streets, are considered as negative attributes. Homeless people may gain a sense of belonging and access to resources and asset sharing through being part of a 'homeless community'. However, as can be seen in the above interview the primary concern of many homeless support workers is that belonging to a 'homeless community' may be seen as a barrier to achieving the outcome of housing homeless individuals (Seal, 2007).

Chorley has a reasonably small homeless population when compared with larger nearby urban areas, such as Preston or Blackburn; however, homelessness often creates a transitory existence and a percentage of the homeless people interviewed attested that they spent time and used services in adjoining towns, and they may feel more attached or have stronger social ties with homeless people in these areas. It is possible that the existence of an established 'homeless community' in Chorley is weaker than in larger more urban areas. If this is the case then it is arguable that the majority of homeless participants may bring a greater sense of individual motivation for change and possible negative perceptions of homeless people as a group to the research than if it was undertaken in, for example, the city of Preston.

From the outset one of the key factors in promoting a change to ABCD as a way of working within HtH was to promote the possibility for positive change for homeless people by working in increased partnership. One of the factors that had led to the exploration of ABCD as an alternative method was the recognition that the way that some of the services were delivered through HtH may have created unintended

consequences of enabling the continuation of need and reliance upon the organisation. The following sections will explore these issues.

6.5   Needs and Strengths

The questions of homeless people's needs and how best to meet them is paramount for organisations such as HtH. Thoughts, opinions and critiques of how best to recognise and serve the needs of homeless people ran throughout the interviews. However, as the research was interested in examining ABCD within a homelessness setting the question of how strengths, capabilities and capacities are recognised and understood among homeless people was an important factor. The participants identified some of the tensions and contradictions between how different groups of people may define needs and strengths. Volunteers expressed a variety of opinions on identifying and enabling the strengths and capabilities of homeless people in assisting themselves and the service.

6.5.1   Needs

Homeless people expressed their views on needs and how they are experienced and could be met:

> HP: *"I can cope well on my own and I get by. I sleep in my car and make enough to get through. I only come here for food sometimes because I have not been paid for any work I have done or to use the phone."*

> HP: *"I don't want a flat me, happy being outside and not having to pay bills (laughs). I earn enough money from begging to get by and get some hot meals from the church and when I come in here. I move around a bit and find bits of work sometimes, so I am doing ok."*

The comments made by some homeless people could be seen as a way of reframing homelessness as a positive choice. Being able to get by and cope alongside rejections of accessing housing was argued to demonstrate the individual's resilience (Blewitt & Tilbury, 2014). One respondent argued that being housed actually created more problems for him than being homeless, through having to worry about paying bills and

maintaining a property. Homeless people referred to having work and only relying on charity when other avenues had been exhausted. This suggests that these homeless people maintained their ability to draw upon networks for accessing casual employment and drew upon their own assets and skills for meeting or supplementing their needs.

> HP: *"I only come to the supper club to meet up with my mates, have a warm and a hot meal if it is cold or wet out. I don't like taking charity from nobody."*

The interview responses suggest that some homeless people reject the idea that they are in need and remain primarily able to support themselves. Follow up questions in interviews suggest that rejecting help and denying need can be seen as a means of defending an identity as someone who is resilient and able to cope with homelessness (Goldstein, 2012). It may assist the person in maintaining a sense of coherence that they still have a degree of control and agency over their life and have not become the same as what they perceive of other homeless people to be:

> HP: *"I don't need much it is the older guys and the younger kids who are homeless who need the help. I help them if I can with food and advice on where to go and what to do. They haven't got the same skill-sets that I have from my past experiences. I used to be in the army and roughing it is not too much of an issue for me. "*

Respondents articulated their views of experiencing complex needs that they felt were often unrecognised or unmet.

> HP: *"I am ill and should be in hospital but they won't admit me, they say I am not ill enough. I keep passing out and have tried to commit suicide a few times and they just give me a couple of days on the ward and throw me back out. I need a place of my own but I can't manage it without loads of support and help, that's why I am homeless cos I can't cope. I have no-one and feel lonely all the time and that I am going mad. Really, it is only this place and being able to help out a bit here that keeps me going."*

Other respondents commented:

HP: *"When you are living on the streets everything is a problem and you have loads of issues. My health is bad and I am cold and sore most of the time. I smoke too much just for something to do and my chest and lungs are not good. You can't get a proper meal and you begin to not eat even when you can get food. I am not blaming people who try and help but the help isn't enough. You [HtH] are only open four days a week now and not at weekend and what do you think it is like if it is raining? The supper club is good but we need it to be on more nights and I hope that happens. We need more help us homeless people."*

HP: *"More should be done to help homeless people. We are human beings and just putting us in hostels or shoving us in flats out the way is not helping. Most of us have massive issues from our past and no-one wants to really ask about that. Yeah I have a flat now, but I am still a person with loads of needs and people act like I should just be grateful now."*

The comments made by these homeless people reject the perception that they have the means and resources to cope and get by. They discuss their needs in terms of the strains that homelessness is putting upon their physical and mental health, and argue that their needs are not being met by the services available. Need is also seen as going beyond the provision of housing and the respondent above takes issue with the perception that they should be grateful for whatever assistance they receive.

Meeting the needs of homeless people is perceived as a core function of HtH, but as highlighted by Maslow (2012) the meeting of 'needs' can become an ever expanding remit unless specifically defined. ABCD was envisaged as a method of bridging the gap between continuing to assist homeless people in meeting their basic needs while seeking a shift in working in collaboration with them to appreciate and utilise their strengths and resilience. However, the idea of what constitutes a need and the most effective method of meeting needs remain contested. Housing a homeless person may be seen as meeting the primary need from the perspective of a homeless charity or housing organisation. However, a homeless person may feel that they experience other equally valid needs, such as loneliness or poor mental health that will not be resolved solely through accessing accommodation (Crisis, 2005; Maguire, et al, 2010). There may be tensions between those who experience a need and those who are tasked with meeting their needs.

Staff and volunteers were asked what they thought their role was and what they felt should be done to meet the needs of homeless people. The consensus was that homeless people presented with many complex needs and that the resources available were not adequate to meet these needs. The solution to meeting the needs of homeless people were generally practical in nature: *"I make them a brew and have a chat."* Only one advisor commented that they saw their role as challenging the decisions of the council and the system in general. From the following comments can be discerned views of need ranging from meeting basic needs (feeding people) as the priority, to taking a more psychosocial view and working with people's emotional and psychological health and, for a minority of volunteers, challenging systems such as council housing departments to seek change:

> V: *"My first job is to get someone to talk to me, and that is not easy in this building. We don't have enough room or enough privacy and we need somewhere more suited to the job. My goal is always to either keep someone in their house or get them re-housed as soon as possible. I often challenge the councils housing department and see them as using us as a dumping ground on occasion. Keeping people off the streets is the most important thing. The needs people have are generally pretty severe. I would say lots of issues around debt and mental health, drugs and alcohol and problems with benefits. Quite a few of my clients have had run-ins with the legal system and many are ongoing. When people come here they are usually pretty desperate and I only wish we could get to them earlier."*

The use of the term 'dumping ground' as used by a housing advisor resonated with many of the comments that homeless people made about themselves, such as feeling like 'shit' or 'rubbish' and not being wanted anywhere. Volunteers commented on their feelings of being overwhelmed by the level of need they encountered:

> V: *"I make the food parcels and stock the cupboards each week. Loads of people are coming in for food now and I don't know if we can cope with the demand. Feeding people should always be the priority. I never remember the amount of families we see now asking for food in the past, and it isn't just homeless people anymore. Some people just can't afford to feed their families now. Err, things are*

bad and if welfare cuts get worse then we are seriously going to have to think about who we can help."

The above quote corresponds with other evidence I gathered around the centrality of the provision of food for people in need becoming ever more a pressing issue. It is interesting that the issue of providing food appears to be argued as a necessity brought around by structural issues, such as benefits cuts, whilst the linkages between structural inequality and homelessness do not appear to have achieved the same resonance.

> V: *"I am a counsellor and I work with people who have suffered emotional trauma. I can only do one afternoon a week at present and am usually booked up. Most of the people I see have had a very tough time and there is usually a story of abuse and mental health behind the problems. I think that we don't spend enough time and resources on helping people who are homeless cope with their past issues and go for the sticking plaster solutions. Their emotional needs are just as important, and I do sometimes feel that my contribution is dismissed as not as important as feeding someone or getting them housed."*

When discussing the needs of homeless people I observed an emotional response from the volunteers. They registered a sense of anger and indignation at the lack of resources and options they had to assist people and I felt a sense of resignation that this was how things are and that they could only continue to do their best with the resources they had. During observations I saw the struggle people had with wanting to give out food to everyone and realising that a lack of resources meant that having to prioritise and ration food was a necessity.

6.5.2   Capabilities and Capacities

HtH operates on the value base that anyone who is judged to be in need should be helped in whatever way is appropriate. However, the help is to be delivered by staff and volunteers and prior to the introduction of the ABCD project little regard was given to the possibility that homeless people may constitute a source of skills, knowledge and assistance. This position is evidenced from the lack of any policies relating to promoting participation for homeless people. Homeless people are more than just a complex set of needs to be met. To be homeless demands that people

develop a high degree of resilience and draw upon personal strengths and resources. Recognising and drawing upon such strengths is one of the key objectives of ABCD (McKnight & Block, 2012). At the outset of the research an effort was made to understand what strengths homeless people may have through interviewing them. Volunteers and staff at HtH felt that they did not have the time or resources to talk to people in depth at the homeless interview process but admitted that they often saw the person primarily in terms of being in need:

> S: *"People who come here need our help and advice. Any other consideration apart from getting a roof over their head or food for them is secondary."*

Homeless people have experiences of education, employment and interests that could be useful in helping them work through their problems. As one volunteer commented:

> V: *"Yes, I see it, homeless people are not born homeless and we don't always see the full person just the homeless part."*

This response suggests that a culture or 'the way we do things' had developed over a long period of time at HtH that saw homeless people in the guise of 'clients'. Throughout the research evidence of such a working culture emerged. For example, at a volunteer meeting I enquired as to why no-one representing the homeless people involved with the ABCD project was in attendance. The reply was that no-one had thought to ask them.

Some of the homeless people participating agreed to draw an asset-inventory listing their strengths and achievements (Block, 2008). On completion one person commented that they didn't know that they possessed these skills and strengths and had forgotten what they used to do. Generally, the process started with the person being negative and commenting on how they had nothing and were homeless but the conversation became more positive as strengths were uncovered and the interviews progressed:

> HP: *"Strengths? What about stealing food from Morrison's, is that a strength?"*

> Alistair: *"Maybe finding something to eat when you have no money and surviving with very little is a strength?"*

HP: *"Yeah, err ok, I can see that. Yeah, it isn't easy sleeping rough and having no money. Ok, ok, so I do survive and yeah that is a strength."*

Another person commented:

HP: *"I don't feel like I have any strengths or skills. I left school with nothing and have done time and have nothing to show for it. You tell me what you think my strengths are?"*

Alistair: *"Fair comment, but what if I asked you could you help me to paint the office? Do you reckon you could do that?"*

HP: *"Course I could, I am pretty good with my hands and making and fixing stuff."*

As the interviews and mapping progressed many of the participants disclosed that they had skills they had not used for a while because they were homeless. These included things such as driving, DIY, building work, motorbike mechanics, chef and a wealth of other skills. Interpersonal and social qualities were recognised:

HP: *"I am like the dad of the group with the people I camp with. I make sure they are all fed and watch out for them, remind them of appointments and stuff like that."*

The response to the asset-mapping exercise from staff and volunteers was mixed. Some saw the possibilities for working in a different way but others thought it was a distraction from their work of housing or feeding people, or defined homeless people as being untrustworthy or unskilled.

S: *"This could be a good way of helping people get on their feet by helping each other. Err, we could put a board up in the hall with things people want help with and people could offer to help them if they have the skill. I like the idea of getting homeless people more involved in the charity and I think we could give them more opportunities."*

V: *"If we wanted the building decorated say then I can see how we could maybe let them help. But not sure if we could trust them and who would supervise? Also a lot of their skills won't be of any use around here."*

These quotes are illustrative of the responses given to the suggestion of involving homeless people more directly at HtH. Views ranged from providing opportunities for homeless people to develop their own ideas and roles to suggesting that providing opportunities for homeless people would require more resources and support. A minority of volunteers expressed the view that such initiatives were not covered by the remit of HtH and that homeless people generally would not have the necessary skills to be able to contribute to the service:

> V: *"This is not our job. We should stick to finding them houses and this is up to the job centre or people like that."*

> V: *"Err, don't take this the wrong way but what if they can't read or write or have mental health problems? I can see too many problems with this."*

Throughout the research there was a constant tension between the perceptions and the wishes of the homeless people and those of the staff and volunteers. Volunteers appeared to define homeless people through a lens of being less capable and lacking in capability to assist in any but the most menial roles. Capability approaches, as theorised by Sen (1984, 2004), argue that notions of social justice should be founded upon what people are capable of. Capabilities theory intersects with theories of need, such as Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs* (2012), in that capabilities may be retarded by a deficit, or the lack of some resource that is considered essential for growth and human development. In the case of homeless people it may be justified in theorising that for some of the homeless volunteers the lack of a place to live limited their capabilities of to undertake tasks that a 'homed' person could be accorded. Housing is a human need, but other possible factors, such as human company, a sense of belonging and identity, purpose and security, may be equally enabled or restrained through ones housing conditions and biographies. Indeed, escaping from an abusive or dangerous home situation may enable an individual to grow and become more capable, rather than acting as a negative force (McNaughton-Nicholls, 2010).

The issues related to the concepts of power and authority. For the staff and volunteers giving homeless people a degree of power within the charity appeared to challenge their beliefs in the structure of the relationship between helper and client:

> V: *"If homeless people are allowed to volunteer and train as advisors then what is the point of us being here? I mean they come to us for advice and help and we have the knowledge to help them. People want professional advice and I think that there is a big difference between being an advisor and a homeless person helping out."*

Even when it was explained that ABCD was fundamentally based upon challenging the notion of client-hood, something which the majority of staff and volunteers agreed was something worth working toward, when personal barriers and roles were felt to be under threat a level of resistance re-emerged. The nature and operation of power within this project and between the people involved will be discussed later in this chapter. Continuing on from strengths and needs the following section questions how the meeting of needs is perceived by volunteers at HtH and whether ABCD has been embraced as an emancipatory approach to social change.

6.6   *Facilitating Change or Enabling Need?*

Interview data suggested a source of conflict existed around the issue of helping people to help themselves or creating and maintaining a sense of dependency upon the organisation (McKnight, 1995). As previously discussed in Chapter 3, 'dependency' is a contested term, and it is problematic in that it holds many value assumptions. However, the term dependency was used by homeless people and volunteers in association with ideas of change and need. A complicated issue relating to initiating the change to an asset-based method of working at HtH, and raised through the interviews was the possibility that volunteers working with homeless people may be enabling homeless people to remain dependent upon their support, through their desire to 'help' and retain their status as volunteers.

6.6.1   *Dependency and Deficiency*

> V: *"What would they do without Help the Homeless? We feed them and sort out their problems and they need this place to get by."*

> S: *"Help the Homeless provides homeless people with the things they need to survive day to day. Sometimes we feed families and how would they feed their*

kids without the help? We give people who can't speak for themselves or help
themselves support and care and without organisations such as Help the
Homeless lots of people would be unable to cope."

Volunteers talked of homeless people being unable to cope without their help and support. This appears to suggest that the volunteers view homeless people as in some way unable to exercise their own agency and care for themselves. Some of the language used appeared paternalistic in nature (Mead, 1997; White, 2000). Much of the language used by volunteers was based around what 'we' do for homeless people. There appears a binary between the volunteers and homeless people and as well as an almost symbiotic relationship, from which the volunteers gain a measure of recognition and affirmation through providing assistance to homeless people. Tensions were displayed between volunteers around the role of enabling homeless people rather than seeking to assist them and to become able to reduce and ultimately resolve their own issues.

During the research period the issue of whether food parcels should be given out to anyone who asks, regardless of status or need, became contentious. The majority of volunteers agreed that some form of policy was necessary that all should adhere to; however a minority refused as they considered it their fundamental duty to feed those who asked:

> V: *"I will carry on feeding people who come in and ask for food regardless of*
> *anyone telling me I must interview them first and only give them enough for a*
> *day. I believe that anyone who comes in and asks for food should be given what*
> *we have, what else are we here for if not for this? I am a Christian and my beliefs*
> *won't let me not feed someone. I am tired of [X] continually telling me I am*
> *wrong but I will keep on doing this until I am told I have to go."*

 A compromise position was reached, whereby after a person had been provided with assistance they would then be required to attend an interview to establish their problems and seek a longer term solution on subsequent visits. This compromise was rejected by one volunteer, who actively resisted through continuing to give out food without following the new guidelines. Unfortunately, this resulted in a confrontation with a fellow volunteer that culminated in them leaving the organisation. I observed

the conflict that this situation created and how divisive the notion of meeting need can become.

The views of homeless people I spoke with concerning this incident demonstrated a high degree of support for the volunteer who had resisted the change in policy. A common response was that many homeless people, and people struggling on benefits relied upon this donated food and attaching any measure of conditionality would increase stigma. This incident highlights the complexity within the debate around meeting needs and empowering people. The importance of these issues is arguably under researched and examined within the theory of ABCD. Reducing services or attaching conditions as a precursor to promoting empowerment may be seen as a positive objective by an organisation using ABCD related theory, but for people who use this service it may be seen in a negative and possibly disempowering light.

The issue of 'dependency' and promoting resilience among homeless people has been recognised as a potential problem within HtH for a number of years. Findings from a research project undertaken by researchers from the University of Central Lancashire highlighted that partner agencies felt that HtH *'hangs onto service users far too long creating conditions of dependency'* (Foord & Drummond, 2009, p.37).

> HP: *"I have been coming here for years and HtH has always been good to me and helped me out."*

> V: *"We don't turn people away and we don't say you can only come to us for so long. Many people keep coming back to us when they have a problem."*

From my own experience of volunteering at HtH and the observational and interview research I can confirm that a number of homeless people have accessed the services of HtH for extended periods of time. This is a complex issue that may be looked at from a number of positions. For homeless people, such as the one quoted above, HtH may provide a lifeline through taking a non-time directed working approach. Indeed many of the homeless people interviewed praised HtH specifically for this approach. However, one must question whether allowing and promoting relationships that can promote a feeling of 'dependency' is helpful. For volunteers this issue can cause conflict as some volunteers view their long-term relationships with homeless people as

an example of genuine care and compassion, while others question whether the policy is healthy and beneficial in assisting homeless people to make positive life changes.

6.6.2   Volunteers and Homeless People: I or We?

The majority of the volunteers interviewed gave personal reasons as to why they chose to volunteer at HtH and work with homeless people. They often related their duties as a volunteer with meeting the needs of homeless people. Few of the volunteers explicitly expressed an opinion relating to challenging the structural causes of homelessness or in enabling homeless people to assist or empower themselves.

> V: *"Volunteering gets me out of the house and lets me talk to other people. I enjoy doing it and **I** like being able to give food out to people who need it. I see it as part of my Christian faith and it is good to help people in need."*

> V: *"I am unemployed and this gives me something useful to do. I am hoping that the skills I am getting will help me get a paid job or ideally some funding may come up and I could be employed here. I like working with the team and it is a friendly place. The people we help are often in desperate need and it feels good to be able to help them. For me if I can get someone housed then **I** have had a worthwhile week."*

Much of the vocabulary in volunteer interviews focused on the volunteers' personal views and often their own needs. However, this is not in any way meant to judge volunteers as selfish in their motivations; I personally believe that through my volunteering I increase my level of well-being through feeling 'good' that I have done something for others. Altruism can be frequently thought of as the justification for why people give their time or resources to help others. A more balanced approach to understanding volunteering may be found through reciprocity:

> *'Although people often claimed to be doing helpful things because "it is the kind of person that I am", they almost always in practice qualify this claim by itemising some rewards or satisfactions they receive because they help others. What looks like beneficence or altruism is in reality part of a generalised reciprocity'* (Hoggett, 2004, p. 62).

An act does not have to be judged as selfless for it to promote positive well-being for both parties involved. Walster, Berscheid & Walster (1976) demonstrated that people generally do not wish to give without receiving, and equally feel a sense of discomfort in receiving without giving something back. A core facet of the theory of ABCD is the reciprocal sharing of gifts and assets, and the fact that volunteers gain satisfaction and an improved sense of well-being from their interactions with homeless people should be recognised as a reciprocal exchange of gifts.

In comparison many of the homeless people interviewed primarily used the term 'we' when discussing issues relating to homelessness. Perhaps this demonstrates at least a subconscious acceptance of belonging to a marginalised and oppressed social group, even one with which some respondents described in negative terms and sought to exit. For many volunteers the meeting of needs was perceived being an incontestable and unproblematic good within itself and suggestions that it may be disempowering for homeless people to be seen or treated primarily in these terms were met with hostility, or simply seen as being critical of a service that provides for homeless people's needs. For example, during observations I questioned a volunteer on whether it homeless people may find it disempowering to be given food for nothing:

> V: *"Why would you say that? We give our time and efforts for nothing, just to help people. They need this food and are grateful for it."*

The research participants discussed their ideas and experiences of helping themselves and self-help at length. This particular theme appeared to hold a complex range of thoughts and feelings and the majority of the homeless people participating linked ABCD specifically to the idea of self-help rather than of notions of community, group working or network building. The following will examine the homeless participants' views on self-help and ABCD.

6.7   Self-Help

The link between theories of self-help and ABCD has been highlighted in earlier chapters. *The Big Issue* street magazine initiative comprising one of the most visible self-help based projects for homeless people (Swithinbank, 1997). This section will

begin through exploring the way that self- help is understood and experienced by homeless people collaborating on an asset-based project.

Oxford Shorter English Dictionary (2007) defines self-help in the following terms:

> *'The action or condition of providing for or improving oneself without assistance from others; the taking of action on one's own behalf'* (Oxford Shorter English Dictionary, 2007, p.2743).

Through actively seeking to engage with homeless people to collaborate in delivering services, HtH sought to draw upon the strengths and abilities of homeless people through a process underpinned by the values of self-help (Wann, 1995). For the homeless people involved with the research the notion and operation of self-help was clearly an important and complex issue:

> HP: *"It is good to have something to do and be asked to take part in something, err, normally being homeless means being ignored. And if you want to know what homeless people think or what will help them then you should be asking us. I don't like taking hand-outs but if I can do something to help then I feel I have earned it if that makes sense?"*

> HP: *"I have had to help myself all my life and I think that no-one owes me anything. I like being able to say that I can do things for myself and if you do too much for people then they just become reliant on help. Being homeless is tough but it helps you to find your strengths and learn how to get by."*

> HP: *"I am doing this because I want to help myself and do something for other people but it sometimes feels like I am expected to be always trying to pull myself up out of the shit you know... Like sometimes it would be good to think that people see me as ok without always having to try and prove I am not a useless junkie or waster."*

The sense of wishing to be visible or of being accepted by other people in the street has links with why certain forms of self-help appear popular among homeless people. From the interview data there is a sense that the homeless people wished to demonstrate or regain their sense of dignity and identity through being pro-active in improving their situation. Swithinbank's (1997, p.47) study of *The Big Issue* initiative

supports this theory through her suggestion that many homeless people become involved in selling *The Big Issue* not simply for economic benefit but also as a means of becoming 'visible' and gaining in self-respect and confidence. The comments support the theory of Walster, Berscheid & Walster (1976) that people wish to give something in return, rather than simply take something as an act of charity.

The following comments demonstrate the feelings of many of the respondents towards the idea of self-help. It was often cited as a positive thing and something that the respondents felt separated them from 'those others' who would not do anything for themselves and did not demonstrate a sense of responsibility:

> HP: *"I mean most homeless people I know have something about them that makes them fuck up no matter what help they get. Like, you go to the council and they say ok we will help you, here is a place and you get your benefits to pay for stuff. Ok, the deal is you help yourself and we will help you, but we just can't do it. Maybe people should only get one chance and then have to get on with it."*

> HP: *"It's right that people should help. People get depressed and lazy if they have nothing to do and homelessness is a real killer for making you bored and feeling like you are useless. Just giving people food and clothes and stuff isn't sorting homelessness, only getting people to get back on their own feet can do that."*

> HP: *"Some people just reckon that they are owed everything and won't even try; like they expect money and food and stuff and won't do anything, you have to put something back when people are trying to help you out. Otherwise the help should go to other people."*

It is interesting that in this research nowhere is the idea of a division between deserving and undeserving homeless people more strongly articulated than among the homeless people themselves. This supports the proposition that notions of a 'homeless community' were weakly defined and rejected by the majority of homeless people interviewed. Self-help appears to take on different meanings when applied to different situations and relationships. For example, many respondents expressed their desire to put something back and assist in helping at the charity but demonstrated a marked resistance when asked would they be prepared to extend their help to other situations, particularly anything related to statutory provision.

> HP: *"Help the homeless have done loads for me and I don't know where I would be without them. If I can help out then I will and I am happy to do so... the council did nothing for me and no way would I help them with anything, they don't help homeless people like me and only care about saving money."*

> HP: *"I think that homeless people should help each other and you [HtH] are volunteers so that is good. I think that them who are paid to work should have to do it and we shouldn't help them unless we are paid too."*

The motivation for volunteering at HtH for the participants appeared to be primarily based upon individual reasons, in the majority of cases. Having something to do and a reason to keep going and change and re-engage with society formed the basis for taking part. The combination of the volunteers and homeless people primarily expressing individualistic reasons for participating at HtH presented some challenges to the ideal of establishing a collaborative strength-based approach balancing individual goals with the aims of developing a community driven project.

> HP: *"What's it for and who is it for? I will help [X] here but not [Y] as they did nothing for me. No way will I do anything for some of those lazy fucks at the hostel, they don't deserve it."*

> HP: *"I am happy to come in and help sort out food and stuff but I am not working with... [respondent names three homeless people they know]. "*

The process of developing a collaborative project involving homeless people and volunteers drew a high degree of resistance from a number of homeless people, volunteers and staff at HtH. For homeless people there was a tension between those who felt that they were trying hard to make a positive change in their lives and those who they saw as undeserving of help. The majority of homeless people involved with or expressing positive views about ABCD and self-help expressed the belief in the individual nature of homelessness, and of the nature of some homeless people as primarily deviant (Lemert, 1967). A possible theory for why homeless people may hold such views about other homeless people may be examined through the routine everyday practices in services provided for homeless people and within the wider realm of media and policy discourse which have been theorised to:

> *'…reproduce and reinforce dominant imaginings about homelessness and homeless people and thus, contribute to producing particular subjectivities, experiences, self-images, and behaviours among homeless people'* (Lyon-Callo, 2000, p.332).

The theory of the reproduction and transmission of homelessness as an individual form of deviance that reduces a person's ability to function and engage with wider society was supported through the comments of volunteers. For volunteers and staff the initial reservations centred on a perception that homeless people posed a safety risk and were possibly ill equipped and unable to undertake volunteering roles within the organisation:

> V: *"What are they going to do and who is going to train them? I am against this and think that we will spend all our time watching them."*

> V: *"I trained as a volunteer and have worked in advice services for years. You can't have people with no experience in these roles. But maybe you can have them doing some other jobs if they are supervised."*

> V: *"Look some of them are alcoholics and addicts and they are not responsible. What if they steal from us or worse if someone gets violent? I don't think we have the staff or the training to be able to do this."*

Some of the volunteers felt that their status was under threat from homeless people becoming more involved with the project, whilst others expressed some negative opinions around the abilities of homeless people to contribute to the organisation. The greatest block to progression appeared to be the widely held view that the majority of homeless people served by HtH experienced drug and/or alcohol issues and that they may constitute a threat to staff or raise health and safety concerns:

> V: *"We can't have people who are drunk wandering about the place. It is just too dangerous, what if someone gets hurt or falls down the stairs? What if someone gets aggressive?"*

When these issues were explored in greater detail evidence for the prevalence of substance misuse amongst homeless people accessing HtH or incidences of anti-social behaviour or violence towards staff and volunteers could not be provided. This is not

to suggest that low-level problems are not an issue within HtH, or that the volunteers did not feel a sense of unease at having homeless people collaborating within the project. However, objections appeared to be based upon negative perceptions rather than grounded upon any basis in fact. Group discussions amongst staff and volunteers delivered a compromise position of initial numbers of homeless people being offered the opportunity to volunteer being limited to two per day and duties to be limited to the food distribution project. One volunteer and ex-homeless person did object to homeless people being offered different conditions than other volunteers. When asked about his own experience of volunteering he offered the following comment:

> V: *"It took me two months to get the chance to train as an advisor and I did feel that the others may have seen me as a bit thick. I was homeless, not stupid. Some homeless people may need more support but yeah, they could try couldn't they?"*

Throughout the interviews issues surrounding substance misuse were raised by homeless and non-homeless participants. Substance misuse was often linked to other areas of discussion and highlighted as a reason for homelessness or passivity and continuing need. The following section will discuss how the use of alcohol or drugs was interpreted by the respondents.

6.8   Alcohol and Drug Use

6.8.1   Perceptions of Drug and Alcohol Use

The perceptions and realities of substance misuse among homeless people emerged as a key theme for both volunteers and homeless people. It impacts strongly on ABCD, both through creating opportunities for inclusion and developing community and in areas relating to practice, for example safety concerns and legal issues. Substance misuse is a trope in the creation of the homeless identity among the general population and could be considered as a definer for the 'culture of homelessness'. Furthermore, substance misuse among homeless people appears to be judged more harshly than amongst other groups:

> V: *"I do think that some of the people we help are in some ways responsible for being homeless. If you don't pay your rent and spend your money on drink or*

drugs, which I know some people do, then surely you have to say they have some responsibility for their situation. Maybe they have made some choices here that need to be challenged."

The idea that substance misuse is the cause of homelessness, as opposed to one of its effects appeared to be held by many of the volunteers. This may be linked to Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of social and cultural taste being used to define and classify people. Many people who are not homeless drink more than is recommended and yet unless they are perceived to be acting in a deviant manner they will not be too harshly judged or defined by their alcohol consumption. Notions of 'working hard' and deserving a drink to reduce stress are commonplace, and yet for homeless people drinking to numb the pain of everyday existence is considered a deviant act. The reasons why homeless people drink may be complicated and possibly arising from rather than being the causation of homelessness:

> *'People on the street drink to cope with the cold weather, depression, isolation, and physical or emotional pain'* (Daly, 1996, p.117).

However, homeless people who drink may often be de facto considered in terms of being incompetent and untrustworthy. This section will examine how these issues emerged from the research data.

The reasons the homeless respondents gave for why substance misuse was seemingly high amongst homeless people generally related to feelings of isolation, loneliness and a crushing sense of boredom:

> HP: *"There is just nothing to do or look forward to and you just want to escape for a while and make it all just go away. Get drunk or stoned or whatever, at least you don't feel it for a while."*

Homelessness was directly associated with loss and loneliness in many of the interviews and this sense of loss went beyond the physical and into the psychological to feelings relating to a loss of identity and sense of self or coherence. However, the predominant view of the majority of homeless people interviewed was that they personally did not use alcohol or take drugs but were generally aware and very critical of other homeless people who they reported did abuse substances.

> HP: *"I don't drink and don't touch drugs. I have no time for people who beg and spend the money on that stuff. They could use the money to get off the streets."*

Perhaps respondents were in some cases saying what they thought I, as a researcher and a volunteer at HtH, would wish to hear. The perceived links between homelessness and substance misuse are well documented and homeless people considered to be substance abusers are *'unofficially viewed as undeserving'* (Ravenhill, 2008). My perception is that at least some of the respondents downplayed their own experience and use of alcohol/drugs while making a case that they saw other homeless people who abused substances as wrong to, at least in part, play to a role that they had accepted as a necessary adaptation to gain resources and respect as a 'deserving' homeless person:

> HP: *"Yeah, I don't touch drugs and drink very little, but I know quite a few of them down at the hostel are always off their heads. They borrow money and have to pay it back with interest out if their benefits and [the landlord] has their bank cards so he can get his money as soon as they get paid. He gives them cheap cans to keep them happy and they are so out of it most of the time that they don't know what day it is."*

> HP: *"I only drink pop, sweets have been my problem, look at my teeth [laughs]. I have no time for winos and junkies and I reckon they are just piss takers. If you carry on like that then you deserve to be homeless in my book."*

There appears to be an unshakeable belief that the majority of homeless people misuse alcohol, illegal drugs or a combination of the two (Main, 1998; Pleace et al 2008). The link between homelessness and alcohol and drugs is well documented and has arguably become one of the defining characteristics that the general public link with homeless people (Johnson et al, 1997; Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008; Fitzpatrick, Bramley & Johnson, 2013). However, whether substance misuse constitutes a pathway into homelessness or occurs primarily as a consequence is contested. The 'common sense' link between homelessness and addiction is a powerful demonstration of hegemony in action. The belief has become so ingrained that it has become a social norm to associate homeless people with drug and alcohol misuse. Indeed, the research demonstrates that nowhere is this belief more powerfully ascribed to than among

homeless people themselves. The previous quote illustrates the power of such beliefs through this homeless man defining other homeless people as 'deserving' of their fate. The reality is such that addiction is used to mask structural forces and label the homeless as deviant and irresponsible.

6.8.2   Substance Misuse as a Barrier to Inclusion

Because substance misuse appeared such an important issue the respondents were asked whether they felt that homeless people with substance abuse issues should receive help and could they benefit from taking part in the ABCD project:

> HP: *"Fuck no! You are having a laugh. These people will just rip you off and cause endless grief. Trust me I know what I was like when I was drinking heavily, the only thing that matters is getting drunk or high. If you are talking about helping then only if they are on AA or a meth scrip. I just don't believe you can help someone while they are off their head."*

> HP: *"To be fair it depends on the individual and their problems. I don't know, some of them can handle the drink and function, you know, but others are just trouble. Help should be given in food and stuff like that, but you have to be careful cos some will even trade tins of food for a couple of cans. If you give them a flat then they won't stop and won't clean it or pay the rent so how does that help? I wouldn't want to work with some of the drug addicts or alcoholics, so for me only if they are clean."*

> HP: *"I suppose everyone deserves a chance but it would be difficult. How do you get them to stay sober and come in and that? It would have to be done very slowly and with a lot of help and I don't think you [HtH] have the money or people to take that on. Probably better to ask people to get help and stop the drink and then try and help to keep them off it."*

Volunteers and staff shared many of the views expressed by homeless people around substance misuse.

> S: *"I think we have a duty to look after the volunteers first and how do we keep people safe from someone who is drunk? I think the policy of not letting anyone in the premises who is drunk or under the influence of drugs is the only way to*

stay safe. We have had money and things stolen from staff and volunteers by clients in the past and I don't think we should allow them in to any of the working spaces."

V: *"Working with people who are addicts is difficult. We have invited the person or client to be involved but this depends upon their activity, erm, you can't browbeat them to come. Erm, and they have to want to come... we do have one particular person who now comes on quite a regular basis but he is a, he also has an addiction and it depends on how he is feeling at a particular time. Some people say they will come and then don't come. Some of the volunteers feel very uneasy around people who use drugs and it is a balancing act trying to help clients and look after volunteers."*

The narrative around alcohol and drugs appears very judgemental and based upon the premise that these issues are predominantly down to individual choice, rather than circumstance. The homeless respondents appear to be using alcohol or drug use as a means of defining themselves as more deserving of assistance and possibly 'morally' superior to those who they define as addicts. It is arguable that this narrative is reinforced through the attitude towards alcohol and drug use among homeless people within HtH and wider society. For example, the interview process at HtH asks homeless people about their alcohol/drug use and what measures they are taking to reduce or stop using. The supposition is clear that the use of alcohol or drugs is seen as a primary factor for an individual's homelessness and the onus is placed upon the person to reduce or stop these behaviours before help can be offered. The presumption of homeless people as addicts and anti-social has definite parallels with Tyler's (2013) social abjection theory: homeless people are de facto defined as outcasts and of negative social value, and their humanity is eroded and stripped away so that they may serve their function as visible signifiers of the consequences of failing to achieve within the constraints of a free-market economy. This highlights the possible harm of using methods such as ABCD, which fail to take into account or challenge structural forms of inequality, or do so in a superficial and uncritical manner.

There was an incident during the research when a homeless person experiencing a drug related problem (who was not a research participant) was caught stealing a small amount of money from the HtH office. The person was barred from entering the

building and unfortunately relations with the local addiction charity that had referred the person for help deteriorated as a result of this episode. I managed to gain an interview with someone from this agency and they responded:

"Look, we know that people have issues around drug and alcohol use and we do everything to try and help them manage or stop their use. I would have thought that Help the Homeless would understand the needs of people struggling with an addiction better and maybe would have either monitored them better or at least have had more understanding when the incident occurred. I am not condoning the person's actions but I am upset that we couldn't have used this incident as a way to help them understand their problem and show that despite this we are still there to support them."

This particular incident and the failure of the local charity forum established primarily by HtH, demonstrates the often 'Janus faced' nature of charity organisations and systems set up to support particular 'clients'; homeless people may be seen as in need while those considered as 'addicts' may be perceived in more negative terms. The addiction organisations expected HtH to share a common understanding and concern for people suffering from addictions as it would for homeless people. However, neither organisation had established a common ground or basis of understanding of the complexity of needs they were trying to meet. The development of a 'silo' mentality, arguably facilitated through government policy that creates an environment of competition for funding via tendering processes is a factor that may restrict the development of ABCD based working.

Research demonstrates the complexity surrounding the theories of addiction as a type of disease, a matter of lifestyle choice, or a combination of genetic predisposition and choice (Russell, Davies & Hunter, 2011; Dunnington, 2011; Schaler, 2000). From the interviews and comments recorded it is evident that the predominant view at HtH appears that addiction is understood to be a lifestyle choice and is something that homeless individuals must seek to address if they are to receive assistance. This position arguably has a negative impact upon engaging with homeless people and seeking to work collaboratively with them:

> V: *"I had a problem with alcohol and had to address it when the time was right for me, I believe that we should not be linking someone's addiction to their housing needs and that by taking a judgemental approach we are actually putting people off seeking our help."*

The staff and volunteers were asked how prevalent they thought the use of drugs and alcohol was among homeless clients and generally for homeless people. According to HtH statistics the majority of people facing or experiencing homelessness attribute this to financial problem or family/relationship breakdown. Less than forty-five percent of all people HtH worked with between 2014/2015 were reported to have any drug or alcohol related issues and the majority of those that did were classified as ex-offenders or young males under the age of 25. However, despite these statistics the volunteers and staff felt that the issue of substance misuse constituted a major problem:

> V: *"I think...I think the actual people... I think there is 1% of people who come through this door who are homeless due to circumstance. The other 99% I am afraid err, use drugs and drink too much."*

> V: *"Most of the people I work with unfortunately live lifestyles that include taking drugs and drinking to excess. I would say for many this is why they are homeless and why they find it hard to get off the streets and maintain a tenancy."*

> S: *"I would say that probably fifty percent of homeless people have a problem with drugs and drink, it just seems to be the nature of things."*

The comments above strongly suggest that there is a perception that many homeless people have 'brought it upon themselves' through their behaviour, specifically using alcohol or drugs. However, a minority of respondents did challenge the predominant view:

> V: *"Well some of us like a drink too! It seems to me that some people are more bothered about homeless people having the money to get drink; you know they resent it if they are skint. But overall if I was in their place I think I would drink too. We are not here to judge and personally I have no issues whether people drink or not, they are still homeless."*

It would appear that value judgements are often made, either consciously or subconsciously when deciding who is worthy of help or who is responsible for their situation during the daily interactions between staff, volunteers and homeless people at HtH. Judging people based on their drinking habits, for example, and linking this to their suitability for assistance or ability to participate runs counter to the principles of ABCD. McKnight & Block (2012, p.138-139) write that many people get labelled by their deficiencies and are thus excluded from participating within the community. The theory of ABCD asks that people are valued for their strengths and not judged for their deficiencies. However, this position is harder to foster in practice than in theory and value judgements that exclude many homeless people from participation are a reality within HtH, and in society as a whole. Such value judgements demonstrate how power operates within the charity, and who has the power to categorise the worthy from the unworthy or provide access to resources. The operation of power often remains unnoticed but is a constant feature of relationships and the dynamics of how HtH operates and delivers its services. The following section will discuss the nature of power and explore how it impacts upon staff, volunteers and homeless people at HtH.

6.9   *Power*

Power emerged as an ever present theme that was reflected throughout the interviews and observations. Power is an inescapable reality of human interactions and areas of political concern. Organisations that work in the field of defining and meeting the needs of marginalised people are inherently engaged with the spheres of politics and power. Chapter 3 discussed power in relation to ABCD and community development and theorised that ABCD may be described as a theory that is reductive around areas of power and structural inequality. As discussed previously power will be analysed in the context of Foucault's theory: how power operates in everyday life and institutions and human relations. Power will not be viewed simply as a commodity that one has or has not but in relational terms; Foucault (1980, p.154) states that *'power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen.'*

The idea of the connections between power, subjectivity and knowledge provides the framework for investigating the operation of power within the context of

homelessness without being drawn into the binary of power and powerlessness. This approach is necessary as the research has highlighted that power operates on a number of levels and that the workings of power can be made evident amongst homeless people and between homeless people and social structures. For Foucault (1980) power often operates as a means of creating/sustaining intervention and regulation and the construction of individuals, knowledge and social structures. In this way power cannot be understood in purely negative terms as something which suppresses or excludes but ultimately as something which creates and impacts upon the way reality is experienced. This approach may also assist in negating the possibility of defining homeless people through the lens of victimhood or powerlessness; to empower people requires the belief that individuals and groups have power that must be made visible to them and channelled through strengthening social bonds and solidarity (Freire, 1985, 2007). The theme of power emerged as an inter-relational concept that was identified in four relational contexts:

1. Power relations between HtH and statutory agencies
2. Power relations between staff and volunteers within HtH
3. Power relations among volunteers and between volunteers and homeless people
4. Power relations between homeless people

6.9.1   Power Relations Between HtH and Statutory Agencies

> V: "*The council see us as an enemy and would be happy if we closed down. They have all the money and the power and we have nothing to fight back with.*"

HtH has existed for over twenty years as a volunteer led organisation, on a shoestring budget and has weathered numerous financial and organisational storms. The organisational culture may be described as one operating in a psychological state of constant siege: seeing itself in a state of constant struggle for survival and at odds with the providers of statutory services. HtH's relationship with statutory services has historically been problematic as it defines its remit as being an independent organisation in support of the homeless. This has often led to conflicts with the borough council housing department over disagreements in data collection, the number of homeless people residing in the town, and in launching legal challenges

against housing department homeless decisions. As one member of staff anonymously stated:

"HtH is set up to take the side of the homeless and if that means challenging the council then that is what we will continue to do. The council see us as a problem and would probably rather we were not here, but they are quick to use us when they need to prove they are working with voluntary partners in the town."

This struggle appears driven through Foucault's (1980) theory of knowledge, power and intervention. Both the council and HtH collect data on homelessness in the town and the data they collect is used to deliver competing narratives on homelessness. For the council rough sleeper counts demonstrate that the town has a negligible rate of rough sleepers and resources are adequate to serve the needs of this group. HtH data forwards a narrative of a hidden and unreported number of rough sleepers who are being written out of local housing policy. The council arguably wishes to control the data and thus the actions taken to reduce and prevent rough sleeping, whilst HtH sees its function as highlighting the needs of this group and challenging the council's locus of control. It is arguable that the use of power by both parties may actually be detrimental in serving the needs of homeless people. I interviewed a housing official at Chorley Borough Council who felt that:

"HtH sometimes doesn't seem to understand or appreciate its relationship with the council. We are actually behind the organisation and feel that it important to have an independent voice within the town. Having said that the challenges put forward are unreasonable and cost the borough far too much money. To put it into context Citizens Advice raised three challenges to the council regarding homelessness decision, I think it was over a dozen from HtH."

It appears that the council sees its relationship with HtH in terms of a partner, but a partner who acts in the interest of local housing policy and homeless decisions and puts these considerations before those of challenging what it perceives to be unjust decisions. There is a complex issue of realpolitik within the relationship between HtH and the council as HtH requires funding from the council to survive and yet wishes to remain independent and able to champion the needs of homeless people.

6.9.2   Power Relations Between Staff and Volunteers

HtH orientates itself as an organisation that campaigns and advocates for homeless people and yet does not define itself unambiguously in such terms. There appears a high level of confusion as to what the organisations primary remit actually is and this can be clearly identified in the lack of a consistent working approach taken by the volunteers. Arguably, personality and seniority have become the means through which a hierarchy has been established among the volunteers:

> V: *"[X] has been here longer than most of us and to be honest I am a little intimidated by him. He is very loud and opinionated and doesn't listen to anyone else. I think it would be better if we had a more equal voice in how things are done."*

> V: *"There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians and really it isn't good enough. I worked for years at CAB and we had a defined chain of command. We need some leadership around here and frankly at the moment I am laying down a lot of ground rules with volunteers and this should be coming from management. I have worked in this sort of industry for more years than I can count and I am concerned at the lack of ability of some of the volunteers we take on."*

> S: *"I try to let everyone work as part of a team and I don't like telling people what to do all the time. I know there are some issues with the volunteers around who is in charge and who can do what but it is difficult to manage volunteers."*

> S: *"They are not paid staff and can just walk out. There are a lot of conflicts and personality clashes and to be honest I feel that I am often ignored or undermined. Perhaps certain people are on a power trip?"*

I discussed the issue of power dynamics with the manager of HtH and this led to a frank assertion that he felt undermined by certain volunteers and had little support from the board. He commented that volunteer meetings he attended often felt like battles for control and that the demands of trying to manage the competing issues of meeting the board's aims and those of the volunteers was like fighting a losing battle. He also felt that the power struggles were unhealthy and prevented HtH from implementing the strategies necessary for its long-term survival:

"I feel that the ABCD initiative is the best thing that has happened to HtH for a very long time. But to be honest I don't think it will be enough to change the culture or the way things are done and without wanting to sound too dramatic I can't see a long-term solution other than HtH ending up having to wind down its services at some point."

Many of the volunteers commented that they felt they had no real support from management and that they had no one to go to with their issues. It was obvious that some of the volunteers were engaged in minor conflicts and would ignore organisational policies and do what they believed to be right:

V: *"Some things we do because they are just the right things to do at the time. I mean you can't run a place like this like a business and we work with people who are in dire need. I don't care if some people disagree I will ignore policy and procedure if it is stopping me from helping someone."*

6.9.3   Power Relations Among Volunteers and Between Volunteers and Homeless People

The operation of power is visible throughout HtH and in the relations between all the actors involved. Volunteers and staff take on the roles they are expected to play as soon as they enter the building and begin work. The divisions between volunteers and homeless people are unwritten and subtle and yet appear clearly demarcated for all to understand:

Alistair: *"You are volunteering on the ABCD project today why don't you go into the kitchen and make yourself a drink?"*

HP: *"I don't think I should I am still not a real volunteer and I don't want to upset anybody."*

The building itself is spatially divided into areas for volunteers and staff and homeless 'clients'. The dividers and doors are not so much designed for security but of keeping a barrier between those on the inside, the staff and volunteers, and those on the outside, the homeless (see Picture 2, page 297 & Picture 6, page 299). A hierarchy exists amongst the volunteers of those considered to have the most knowledge, the housing advisors, those who work on the food project and general volunteers

responsible for cleaning duties etc. This hierarchy is unwritten and tacit and yet is rarely questioned or challenged:

> V: *"I got in trouble for seeing a client of [X's] the other day when he wasn't in. He went mad and said I shouldn't be advising his clients and that I am not trained to offer advice."*

This person is highly educated and appears more than capable of undertaking the advice role and yet deferred to another volunteer and accepted this treatment based upon a perceived level of status structure between volunteers. Housing advisors work on a 'case load' basis but there appeared a definite culture of advisors wishing to 'guard' or retain sole ownership of their cases. I questioned the procedure for an advisor to see someone who was working with another advisor should they be ill or away from their desk:

> V: *"Well I get very annoyed as people do not keep detailed records. As you can see I have files on all my clients and I maintain a detailed database. Unfortunately I would have to say that the other advisors do not keep to the same standards and I often have to re-interview to get the details I need."*

Other volunteers refuted this and felt that the issue was one of people wishing to maintain exclusivity when working with a homeless person:

> V: *"We should be team working and sharing information better. A big part of the problem is that we are volunteers and only in at certain times. I do feel that certain individuals feel that they know best and are unwilling to share information though."*

Knowledge of procedures appears to be often guarded and limited to advice staff and training only offered to certain candidates:

> Alistair: *"Would you not like to train as a housing advisor?"*

> V: *"I probably would but [X] is always saying he is busy and is having [Y] do some shadowing. When I started I wanted to do housing advice but I don't think I will get the chance."*

Access to knowledge and information is fundamental in the production and operation of power and status. The operation of power within HtH provides an example of Foucault's (1980) theory of power as situational and relationship based. For example, many of the volunteers at HtH are unemployed or seeking employment prospects. In many areas of their lives they may experience thoughts and feelings of a lack of agency or power to improve their situations. However, upon entering HtH and taking on the role of a housing advisor they experience an increase in their perceived status and gain a measure of power in relation to other volunteers who are not trained to provide advice, and with homeless people who understand that advisors have the knowledge and power to help them get housed. In many respects power appears not to be taken from one person but is in fact given through recognition of status.

However, the operation of power, even at this micro level should not be seen as neutral: for example, the establishment of rules and sanctions that are applied differently depending upon the status of individuals and groups. A homeless person can be sanctioned through the removal of services or restricted from entering the building for an infraction that is perceived as anti-social by a volunteer or member of staff. There are many rules applying to the behaviour of homeless people, visible on posters and signs throughout the office, yet nothing visible applying to the behaviour of volunteers and staff. Although in principle a complaints procedure exists for homeless people to use should they feel they have been badly treated, in reality, and to my knowledge as a volunteer, this option is rarely, if ever utilised.

6.9.4   Power Relations Between Homeless People

> HP: "*I can't go to the supper club because some of the guys from the hostel are out to get me because they think I grassed them up for something.*"

The above quote demonstrates the necessity to not simply judge homeless people as a homogenous group who are powerless victims. Hierarchies exist within and between homeless people as in any other walk of life. I have observed long-term street homeless people discussing status through norms of who is the best survivor and demonstrates the highest level of resilience. These types of resilience can take the form of how much someone can drink or how many times they have been in prison or fought. Perhaps the unpredictable and sometimes dangerous nature of homelessness

forces people to accept forms of norms and values that are at odds with those of people who are homed and live in relative security. For example, violence among homeless people is theorised to be statistically higher among long-term homeless people who use temporary hostels (Price, 2009). Perhaps the environment of hostels and the stress of living with a situation of insecurity over an extended period of time may heighten people's aggressive or defensive reactions to stressful situations. The homeless people involved in the research who had experienced living in hostels did discuss homelessness more in terms of the power relations involved in survival:

> HP: "*You can't be seen as weak in there you know. Shit, it's like being in prison and you have to show them you can look after yourself.*"

> HP: "*Tried to send me to Blackburn again to the hostel, no way, I have done with the hostels, too many fights and drugs and drink. Always someone trying to bully someone else or get something from you.*"

The responses of the homeless people interviewed highlight the issues of power relations and the problematic nature of defining people through notions of a 'homeless community'. One could argue that power struggles for dominance and status are natural human traits and occur with schools, businesses and throughout society. However, if ABCD is based upon the premise of building strong community relations and social capital then issues such as the power dynamics between individuals and groups demand serious consideration and reflection.

6.10   Reflections

ABCD seeks to unite communities based upon building an association of associations that can leverage the combined assets of the community to develop positive change (McKnight & Block, 2012). To achieve these aims requires creating an environment that encourages and supports the participation of all community members. The data gained from the interviews and observations demonstrates the complexity and challenges involved in meeting these objectives. However, the research does provide some questions and possible avenues of exploration that may be useful in working towards this goal.

It is arguable that generating an understanding of the experiences of homelessness, from the perspective of homeless people, could assist HtH in developing a greater awareness of the feelings and level of well-being of the people they are seeking to assist. In particular, despite the positive rhetoric of ABCD many homeless people experience a high level of genuine unmet psychological and physiological need, and attempting to engage them in an asset-based way, before making efforts to meet some of their primary needs, may prove detrimental to their overall well-being. To work towards facilitating an environment where positive change may become an option developing a greater sense of openness and solidarity between volunteers, staff and homeless people may have positive benefits.

A foundational concept of ABCD is the importance of story-telling or establishing a positive community narrative to create an environment fostering possibilities for change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Although on first reading the narratives provided by the homeless people appeared to offer little in the way of hope, the sharing of these narratives assisted in developing relationships with the homeless people involved and presented them with the opportunity to tell their stories as they wanted them to be heard (Bloomfield, 2013). This is in accordance with Freire's (2006) belief that people need to be given the opportunity to understand the forces of oppression within society, through storytelling and dialogue, and then apply them to their own experience before they can begin to undertake the journey towards emancipation.

The homeless people interviewed generally expressed homelessness through terms of the negative impacts it has had upon their lives and sense of self. ABCD seeks to provide an inclusive and participatory approach to working with people. People who have, or who are, experiencing homelessness, particularly those experiencing street homelessness, often have a range of complex psychological and physiological needs that require recognition and assistance if their situation is to be improved. The complexity of these issues may present a difficult challenge for homeless organisations and the people who work/volunteer within them, such as HtH, to promote and deliver participatory based ABCD strategies and services. However, it is arguable that through the process of exploring their experiences of homelessness people may begin to better understand the wider context in which their experiences are situated and possibly

form new ways of thinking about the situations through the process of problematisation (Freire, 2006).

My own observations and thoughts make me question the possibility that the level of status, and feelings of belonging to or having a sense of ownership of HtH, that many of the volunteers expressed may have actually been detrimental to creating a more open and participatory environment for homeless people. Perhaps a measure of defending the hierarchy and status of being volunteers subconsciously fostered an outlook of viewing the inclusion of homeless people as equal partners with a level of wariness and unease. Perhaps the feeling of belonging to an association of volunteers and wishing to defend this identity through limiting access to others conflicts with the idea that associations are a stepping stone for building strong communities using ABCD (McKnight &Block, 2012).

Notions of community and self-help are seen as mutually strengthening through ABCD. However, from the research it would appear that homeless people currently view community in generally negative terms and do not feel a sense of belonging or involvement. Conversely self-help appears to be understood through the lens of an individualistic and possibly neo-liberal ideology of making the best of one's position or pulling yourself up by your bootstraps. Notions of othering, indirect racism and protecting the boundaries of community were apparent within the narratives of some respondents. Arguably, self-help, when deployed in such a manner, is of negative value to building community relations and opening up opportunities for participation; indeed it may be found to be exclusionary and use as a method to keep the 'undeserving homeless people' out.

Self-help, as interpreted through the comments of the respondents, appears to be influenced through neo-liberal and communitarian paradigms situating it within the realms of individual improvement, through gaining in skills and employment and reducing or abstaining from activities considered socially unacceptable (Berner & Phillips, 2005). Such a construction is troubling in that it neglects to recognise the operation of power within the creation and reproduction of inequality; homelessness is reduced to a state of individual choice and failings, and self-help becomes the method through which a homeless person must engage to become a functional and acceptable citizen. However, I concur with the view that:

'true citizenship is not a possibility in a context of marginalisation and social exclusion, yet the concept of citizenship has been used by the New Right as an ideological tool for blaming the victims of a society which denies them the right to participate' (Ledwith, 1997, p.24).

Self-help may enable an individual to move from homelessness but in doing so it neglects the necessity for promoting social justice and the politics of inequality and redistribution. I would argue that the theory of ABCD is complicit in promoting self-help as the means for individuals and communities to overcome social issues, such as poverty or homelessness. Individuals and communities are encouraged to take responsibility and action to solve their own issues, through utilising their own resources without challenging the structural causes of such issues. The inequitable distribution of resources within society is a key factor in creating and entrenching social issues, and ABCD, in common with the idea of the 'Big Society', may be critiqued as being complicit in the operation of a system which transfers resources away from the poorest individuals and communities and then hands over the responsibility for them to deal with the inevitable negative consequences.

On a personal level I am concerned that without challenging this process my practice runs the risk of being at best one of amelioration and a system of triage that assists some homeless individuals to gain in skills and employability yet does nothing to challenge the processes of marginalisation and inequality behind the issue of homelessness. Perhaps the way people respond to homelessness should be viewed not through the lens of anti-social or deviant behaviour but as rational from of coping and resistance against a form of oppression that is all consuming in nature. For example, whilst the use of substances as a means of surviving and refusing to be destroyed by the depressing realities of the homelessness existence may seem an illogical proposition to those not in this position, oppressed people have historically developed many forms of subversive and covert resistance to their oppressors and such behaviours take on a new meaning when viewed in this context (Scott, 1985).

Definitions and methods for quantifying homelessness are often linked to socio-economic and political pressures inherent at the period of time under study and remain deeply contested (Harvey, 1999; Anderson & Tulloch, 2000). The political nature of the construction of homelessness is linked to wider socio-economic forces,

from the local to the national and the supra-national or global. The issue appears to be one of moving beyond the simplistic dichotomy of structural or individual causes of homelessness and seeking a means of advancing solidarity and community between people, whether homed or homeless, built upon common ground of humanity and reciprocity.

On an optimistic note, community work has historically been the domain of women. This is not necessarily an outcome of choice but one of need; it should be remembered that working-class women in particular *'often bear a triple burden: of household, community and work'* (Hoggett, 2004, p.67). The economic reality of living in a society organised upon the basis of work and consumption while promoting inequality and completion as positive attributes weakens notions of solidarity and community. Women are expected to enter paid employment and motherhood becomes a commodity that is outsourced into the realm of paid care. The stay at home mum is castigated, and the 'single mum' is demonised as a benefit dependent and a drain upon resources who is expected to raise her children to be a further drain upon society. Against all the odds it is women who primarily struggle to maintain a sense of family and community outside of the realms of commodification. Through the process of hegemony men have generally accepted the role of workers and providers along with the belief that to not be able to fulfil these roles is to be a failure as a man.

Women can and do become homeless, and as was argued earlier they may experience homelessness in a different way to men, through the loss of security and status of being a homemaker. However, all of the homeless people who participated in this research were males and thus the research can only report homelessness from a male perspective. Despite the arguably gendered nature of community work there does appear the possibility to encourage and forge a spirit of community involvement within some of these homeless men. Perhaps, as is often common among certain sections of the population the notion of reciprocity can be fostered to replace the reason of financial reward which views community work as primarily a means of gaining employment.

The research highlights the gravity of the physical, psychological and emotional challenges and issues that many homeless people are confronted with. Their daily struggles to survive and maintain a sense of identity and self-worth made me question

how I would cope in this situation. This brought me back to the need to look the issue of homelessness in the context of Freire's emphasis on critical consciousness. It appeared clear in the research that homeless people were perceived as being in need of help rather than of being the victims of an unjust system, and my perception is that ABCD could reinforce this perception through its lack of structural analysis. Through my dialogue with people involved in the research it did become apparent that there was a 'space' for exploring critical consciousness with people and in challenging some of the preconceived ideas of homeless people that appear to have taken on a hegemonic nature. The theories of Freire, Gramsci and theories relating to power need to continually remain in vision and be applied with the intention of raising critical consciousness to challenge the injustices within the realm of homelessness.

 A synthesis and interpretation of the findings in regard to ABCD including suggestions for practice and research as well as my reflections on the overall research and application of ABCD will conclude the thesis.

CHAPTER 7: ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: THE COMPLEXITY OF PERSPECTIVES

Through examining the theory and application of ABCD from the perspectives of homeless people and those working with them, in addition to critically examining my own role and experiences through the lens of a volunteer/participant researcher, I have developed a greater knowledge and understanding of the complexity and challenges involved with applying, or rejecting, ABCD as a means for promoting the involvement and positive opportunities for change among homeless people. In this chapter, I will outline the issues that the research study has uncovered. I will provide an interpretation of what they may mean in regards to implementing ABCD. An overview of the possible positive and negative impacts of the project upon HtH as an organisation, the volunteers and staff within HtH and for the homeless people who access the service will be provided. I will also include recommendations for possible service development and further research, and examples of services at HtH that have evolved through linkages with the research will be highlighted. I will conclude by reflecting on the research and how it has impacted upon HtH as an organisation, extended my own personal knowledge, and most importantly has been reported as benefitting the homeless people who participated.

7.1   ABCD: Community and Participation

The research highlights the complexity of community and in particular it draws attention to the necessity for being wary of accepting the unproblematic notion of concepts of sub-communities, based upon assumptions of common or shared cultural norms, such as the idea of a 'homeless community'. Strengthening communities and promoting participation are fundamental building blocks for ABCD (McKnight & Block, 2012), but findings from the research suggest that, for the homeless people who participated in both the research and food distribution project, reconnecting or developing links with the local community was a difficult and problematic process. They felt disconnected to the local community, and yet either rejected belonging to any definition of a 'homeless community' or defined such a community through

primarily negative terms, such as being predicated upon a culture of drink, drug use and begging for money. The findings suggest that for homeless people, community, along with citizenship, is something that one sees revoked or deferred until the issue of being homeless is resolved (Bauman, 2001, 2007; Merteens & Zambrano, 2010). The homeless people who became the most actively involved expressed that they saw this as part of a process to regain, skills, employment and as a means of exiting homelessness and rejoining the majority community. It appeared that these homeless people had come to accept their reduced status and embraced the notion that it was their responsibility to change their lives and 'rejoin' society. With this came a perverse sense that they should be seen as the most ardent critics of other homeless people and disassociate from having any common ties with this group. Perhaps what is necessary is for people to move beyond seeing homeless people as 'the other', and rather than through pity or embarrassment offer a handout and alternatively move towards a Freirean reimagining of homelessness as an unnecessary social ill and the experience of homeless people as part of our common social history. Homelessness, poverty, social inequalities in health and education should all be defined as structural issues that are not natural or predestined but are the product of political and economic systems (Steinbock, 1999).

The research finding which troubles me the most is the continuing dominance of the belief in homeless people as being classified through notions of being deserving or undeserving. To re-engage with community, homeless people in the research arguably felt required to demonstrate their deserving nature through embracing individualistic notions of self-help. The concept of self-help appeared underpinned through the ideology of returning to employment and rejecting perceived forms of anti-social behaviour, such as substance misuse. One of the outcomes of this process reported by the respondents, which is supported through observational data and academic literature, is that homeless people continue to be defined through notions of being deserving or undeserving of assistance (Daly, 1996; Seal, 2005; Clapham, 2012b). The negative construction of images and perceptions of homeless people may be reproduced and transmitted via references to a 'culture of homelessness' (Ravenhill, 2008). This is a distinction which may be maintained by homeless people themselves. Homelessness, within this narrative, becomes removed from the possibility of a critical

debate around inequality and oppression and is reduced to the realm of misfortune or individual responsibility.

ABCD argues that developing communities requires an inclusive approach, and that each individual has strengths and gifts to bring to the community (Green & Haines, 2002). However, the research findings suggest that for the homeless people and the volunteers at HtH this assertion is more complex than it may initially seem. Homeless people were primarily perceived through notions of need and deficiency by HtH, and despite implementing ABCD inspired thinking and processes within the organisation this position arguably remained dominant. Through the research, I came to appreciate the power of the signifier of 'homeless person' in constructing commonly held perceptions, shaping interactions and ultimately in limiting the opportunities offered to those so labelled.

Participation within HtH projects among homeless people was characterised as facilitating the opportunity for creating a space for positive change and enhanced feelings of well-being among the majority of the homeless participants. Participation was linked to feelings of belonging and increased self-worth. Homeless people identified feeling that they had a sense of purpose and an increased sense of a positive identity. However, the negative issues included an increased sense of stigmatisation aimed towards other homeless people who were perceived as being lazy and undeserving for not exhibiting a greater desire and motivation to undertake self-help.

An increased level of collaboration and solidarity became evident between those homeless people having the greatest level of involvement and the volunteers and staff at HtH. Due to the restrictive size of HtH and a lack of physical space, the project may have increased the opportunity for participation among a minority of homeless people but possibly at the expense of creating a greater sense of marginalisation for those homeless people considered as being unworthy of assistance and in some way culpable for their own state of homelessness. This arguably demonstrates the problematic nature in providing opportunities to promote inclusion and develop community without further increasing and magnifying the marginalisation of others.

From undertaking the research I would argue that issues of social exclusion, oppression and economic inequality require recognition and challenge to provide the

terrain for the inclusion within community of those excluded and marginalised. Without this recognition, ABCD – as I perceived it to operate within this research – was limited through pre-conceived notions of the nature of homelessness. Specifically, there was a sense that homeless people, were, at least in part, individually responsible for their status and thus by definition 'deficient' in some manner. In general ABCD was understood as a process to initiate self-help and for homeless individuals to gain skills and confidence and ultimately re-join the 'housed' community. For many volunteers, raising the consciousness of homeless people and forming alliances to explore and challenge the existence of homelessness within society, was either not considered or was dismissed as being too big an issue to begin to understand. Without challenging such preconceptions, the idea of community appears to remain situated upon hierarchy and status and defined along the binary lines of inclusion and exclusion.

The current hegemony of neo-liberal thought appears to have permeated almost every area of society and as such the need to examine and promote strategies of counter hegemony that provide spaces for new ways of thinking has become vital for a strategy for change. I would argue that HtH are not actively maintaining negative perceptions of homeless people but are not overtly challenging them. This is possibly as a result of feeling that their power to affect change to lifelong beliefs is severely limited. I maintain strong reservations that ABCD should be implemented at HtH as an inclusive form of community development as a culture of classifying people through perceptions of deserving and undeserving remains unchallenged and the research demonstrates that ABCD does not offer the conceptual tools to explore these issues in the manner that more radical forms of community development present.

7.2   Social Capital and Homeless People

Building networks or communities is at the core of community development. When working with homeless people, in particular those living at the very margins of society, the issue of perceiving community as inclusive or exclusive stands in sharp relief. Prior to the introduction of the ABCD project, HtH provided negligible opportunities for homeless people to participate. The introduction of asset-based inspired thinking and the development of opportunities for participation, such as the food distribution

project have increased the level of involvement for homeless people within HtH. However, the necessity for developing and strengthening networks and forms of solidarity appears to have been neglected. In part I would argue that this may be down to the difficulty in bridging the gap between the community and its most marginalised members.

ABCD and social capital theory presupposes that a measure of positive social capital is available to be tapped into by all members of a community. However, the research findings suggest that this is not the case for many people who have been, or remain, street homeless. I would argue that it is necessary to revisit and critique the notion of a 'culture of homelessness' (Ravenhill, 2008).

 The concepts of a 'culture of homelessness' and a 'homeless community' were rejected and seen as negative signifiers by the homeless people involved in the research. Social capital theory may in some ways draw from or strengthen such concepts through examining the networks and relationships of people within a particular situation or 'community'. For example, if homeless people are defined as belonging to a 'homeless community', and if such a community is defined through exhibiting a 'culture of homelessness', then one may ask who defines this culture and how? Perceptions of homeless people are often shaped through media and political channels and primarily take the form of negative stereotypes: the drinking, drug taking beggar, who is now often caricatured as being an illegal migrant. If homeless people are stigmatised and perceived through such a lens then it is questionable whether any form of positive social capital can be developed until the norms of homeless people are changed. Through this process, the cycle of an individual blame culture can be continually reproduced and transmitted.

ABCD was understood and implemented differently at the two research sites. At HtH two perspectives became apparent: one view which saw homeless people as valuable assets who brought an extensive knowledge of the experience of homelessness to the organisation; and the other, arguably more dominant, view that providing opportunities for homeless people to participate would be difficult to achieve and was perceived as a threat to the volunteers' status. At the United Reform Church (URC) supper club, ABCD was implemented through the idea that the church volunteers were responsible for managing and running the project and participation remained the

exclusive domain of church members. The dominant view restricted opportunities for homeless people to become more involved in the projects and constituted a barrier to creating and extending concepts of social capital.

Building social capital demands an understanding of the workings and processes of exclusion. Through taking a Freirean approach in examining homelessness it became clear that homeless people have a deep understanding of their condition and, if given the opportunity to discuss and problematise homelessness, a critical dialogue can begin. I would argue that this knowledge of homelessness forms a positive asset that is being overlooked by homelessness organisations, such as HtH.

The key to developing a greater understanding of homelessness and thus to tackling its root causes is to be found through engaging with and empowering homeless people. To provide an example, the Cardboard Citizens homeless theatre group (see section 4.3.4) performs powerful Freirean-inspired forum theatre productions (Boal, 2000). This style of theatre was developed by Augusto Boal in Brazil during the 1960s, who identified theatre as a place for dialogue, critique and as a critical space in which oppression can be named and challenged. In essence, Boal wanted to create a space where a different, more inclusive and humanistic society could be imagined and through drama actually brought into the realms of being an achievable goal. To understand the crucial nature of access to critical space one should understand the context of repression and political violence which Boal, and his fellow pedagogue Paulo Freire, endured during their life in totalitarian Brazil. The Junta which took power following a military coup in the 1960's saw the work of people such as Boal and Freire as reactionary and a threat to their oppressive regime. In 1971 Boal was kidnapped, tortured and eventually exiled to Argentina where he continued to develop and practice his revolutionary theatre before returning to Brazil following the removal of the military Junta. He established a major centre for theatre of the oppressed in Rio. The type of thinking and action demonstrated by people such as Freire and Boal are even more necessary as the hegemony of neo-liberalism exerts an ever increasing force upon people's lives.

Giroux & Giroux (2006) highlight how neo-liberalism works to close down forms of critical space:

'As a result of the consolidated corporate attack on public life, the maintenance of democratic public spheres from which to launch a moral vision or to engage in a viable struggle over institutions and political vision loses all credibility—as well as monetary support. As the alleged wisdom and commonsense of neo-liberal ideology remains largely unchallenged within dominant pseudo-public spheres, individual critique and collective political struggles become more difficult' (Giroux & Giroux, 2006, p.26).

It is against this background that forms of critical pedagogy become ever more vital to struggle against forms of oppression, marginalisation and inequality that are grossly increasing under neo-liberal policies. The work of Freire and Boal offer the means to challenge the forces of hegemony and envision and act to secure a more equitable future for all through the process of making the normal extraordinary and seeing the potential for change in people and situations.

Forum theatre operates through depicting short scenes based upon problems facing a community; these could be themes around patriarchy, class, poverty, race or a combination of social issues pertaining to the audience. The audience are invited to stop the performance at any point and to enter the stage and act out their own solution or take on the issue. In this way people become empowered to not just envisage change as a possibility but to act out and become empowered as a vehicle for change.

Through these productions both the homeless and the homed collaborate on a process to increase awareness and consciousness of the structures and forms that homelessness takes and the nature of the oppressions which underpin it (Cardboard Citizens, 2015). I would argue that it is through developing such 'spaces' for collaboration and dialogue that social capital is strengthened.

The dialogue throughout the research with homeless people was based upon listening and collaborating around the topics that emerged. This presented an opportunity to discover and generate ideas and theories, through sharing narratives. Through this process, a person's state of homelessness was often reconfigured as constituting but one stage of their life, rather than being perceived and articulated as a complete and often overwhelming identity, or more accurately a sense of loss of identity. Drawing

from the theory of habitus (Bourdieu 1984, 2000) assisted me in interpreting people's homeless narratives through a new lens. The homeless people interviewed viewed their history through the lens of homelessness and oppression. However, through understanding the influence that the process of hegemony has upon defining our perceptions and beliefs, and that despite its power it can be challenged through a process of counter hegemony (Gramsci, 2012), an opportunity to develop new opportunities for understanding and raising the consciousness of homeless people was witnessed. A homeless person commented in our closing interview that:

> *"Being homeless means you stop thinking. You shut off and survive and you become silent. Through talking with you and having a say I have found a way to feel heard again."*

7.3   Suggestions for Implementing and Improving Services at Help the Homeless

The following suggestions were developed from the research and through undertaking a series of meeting with volunteers and homeless people. This list of suggestions is due to be discussed by the board at HtH at their Annual General Meeting in summer 2016 with a view to incorporating agreed points into a mission statement.

The points listed below are based around discussion with volunteers at HtH and represent the areas that they would wish to see explored and developed within the organisation:

- Volunteers and staff require more training and a greater joint understanding and personal appreciation of why they are using an asset-based approach and what this means for the organisation, in regards to both the working ethos and practice.
- Discussions should be held to establish and clarify what approach HtH as an organisation takes towards homeless people. Does the organisation exist mainly to challenge the structures of homelessness or to ameliorate the suffering and meet the immediate needs of individual homeless people?

- Perceptions of a volunteer hierarchy and working in 'silos' should be explored and challenged.

The following are suggestions relating to the development of social capital and building networks:

- Links with other organisations should be forged and strengthened and opportunities for participation developed across a group network. Homeless people may wish to participate in projects unrelated to homelessness.
- In light of the above point HtH should investigate the possibility of restarting the local forum for voluntary services in Chorley.
- Discussions should continue to progress with URC around collaborative working practices and establishing a common mission statement.
- HtH should examine links between the various faith-based organisations in the areas that deliver food banks and meal clubs so that the network can provide a more collaborative approach that does not duplicate services.
- ABCD should be revisited and homeless people should be included in discussions around whether and how it can be used to best serve their needs. Of critical importance was the idea that other forms of community development may offer people the chance to develop their own level of critical consciousness and challenge the structural causes of homelessness. However, this point was contentious and obvious resistance was displayed by some members of the HtH board.
- Homeless people and volunteers require a place to meet and discuss services as equal partners. Volunteer meetings should include homeless people.
- HtH should undertake to view all homeless people as potential volunteers and people who have valuable knowledge of homelessness that can be used to assist service development and delivery.

Recommendations for improving the working environment and developing service delivery:

- HtH should examine their existing initial homeless interview paperwork and process and question how it can be rebalanced away from a primary needs-

based assessment towards a more strength-based (although not necessarily ABCD) approach.

- HtH has begun to explore time-banking and has introduced a time-bank credit system for its volunteers. Currently in the pilot stage, it has been proposed that homeless people should be able to access this initiative.

- There was a general consensus that the HtH building is not fit for purpose and this could form the basis of a joint project. In the short to medium term HtH could organise redecoration and update the building within realistic parameters. My student cohorts at Runshaw college have instigated a project to explore means of assisting with decorating and repairing the current building.

- HtH should develop a long-term strategy of locating a new base of operations and develop fund-raising and campaigning strategies to achieve this objective.

All of the above suggestions have come from homeless people and volunteers involved with HtH. They are open to debate and represent the starting point for examining the future development of the charity. However, the charity remains at extreme risk financially and many people within the organisation are tired and worn down with the struggle to continue. It is my hope that on completion of this research I may in some way be of assistance in helping to support HtH in not only continuing but in introducing means for homeless people to have a greater voice and measure of control within the organisation.

7.4   Recommendations for Further Research

The following are recommendations for future research that have emerged from the research:

- I have looked at how ABCD operates at HtH with a small group of homeless people and volunteers. I would wish this thesis to be read in the context of an ethnography of HtH and organisational change rather than as a demonstration of any general rules that can be applied to different situations. However, comparisons with future research along similar lines could open up new

theoretical possibilities, such as further research that challenges the negative connotations of the 'culture of homelessness'.

- Having undertaken the research I would suggest that further research would benefit from taking the form of a prolonged longitudinal study. Organisational change may occur and deviate over a long time span and this research may only represent a snapshot. I intend to continue to monitor and revisit the project and publish the research findings.

- I feel that my initial instinct to undertake the research as a pure form of Emancipatory Action Research was correct and would now only undertake future research using this method. Perhaps the demands of meeting the guidelines of a PhD restricted the research and any future research will be designed in collaboration with the participants from the outset. I feel that in developing the research question without participant involvement I unwittingly created some of the issues of power and identity that I faced throughout the research.

- Managing the roles of researcher and volunteer at an organisation with which I have a long history proved difficult. The key difficulties being the tensions I experienced in trying to maintain a sense of balance in my relationships with volunteers and homeless people and in maintaining a role as a participant observer and feeling unable to intervene in situations directly. Placing my own practice under the research spotlight highlighted areas of concern within my personal practice that have been testing. The research has been emotionally challenging and I would caution other researchers to remain aware of the difficulties involved with undertaking similar research projects.

7.5   *Going Beyond the Research: An Example of Praxis*

Throughout the research I remained conscious of my belief that research needs to be complemented by action through a form of praxis (Freire, 2006). As the research progressed I became aware of some spaces for praxis to occur. My students at Runshaw College were very involved with the research and expressed a keen interest in learning more and in doing something to assist homeless people. I arranged a field trip for them to visit The Foxton Centre in Preston to gain a better understanding of

the work it does through seeing it first-hand. From this experience a group of students organised and managed a disco in aid of The Foxton Centre and raised a significant amount of money.

My father was also very interested in the research and wanted to know if he could assist in any way. We discussed his previous experience of organising ultra-long distance running events and the possibility of us collaborating on organising an event in support of the homeless. We enlisted the help of The Foxton Centre and students at both Runshaw College and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and formed a committee to manage the event. Ian Tolson played a key role in this and initiated the involvement of his scout troop, providing tents and catering facilities throughout the event. As a group we discussed notions of community, solidarity and power and were united in our goal of working to establish a genuine space for equal participation and recognition. Students, academics, volunteers, homeless people and members of the local community all came together to make the event a success and new alliances and friendships were formed.

The first annual Preston Foxton Centre 24 Hour track race was held in May 2015 at the UCLan Sports Arena in Preston (see Picture 15, page 304). As well as assisting in the organisation of the event I participated as a sponsored athlete, and the event raised a significant sum for The Foxton Centre and helped to heighten awareness of homelessness issues. Following on from the success of this event a six hour race was held in Chorley in October, in aid of HtH. The second Foxton Centre event is planned for June 2016 and promises to be an even greater success. It is not primarily the money raised through these events that defines their success; it is that they gave people the opportunity to come together and collaborate as equals, regardless of their skills and status, and engage in dialogue and action aimed at challenging inequality. These events demonstrate the power of community and how drawing upon people's skills and assets can become a force for change. It also represents a form of praxis as ideas around why people are homeless were discussed by the group and theories were explored in an attempt to find ways to challenge homelessness. During these discussions wider concerns with the plight of asylum seekers and people in poverty were raised and the group set itself the task of looking at what it could do to work at

challenging such fundamental structural equalities. In this way the race has been a vehicle for promoting a sense of conscientisation and praxis.

Furthermore, homeless figures demonstrate a marked increase as government welfare cuts and increasing housing costs combine to push the poorest towards homelessness (Cooper, 2015). In this climate it becomes ever more important that research such as this develops awareness and forms of community to challenge the processes of neo-liberalism and to assist those most damaged by the policies of austerity.

7.6 *Revisiting the Research Aims*

Throughout the research I have remained aware of the issues around being led primarily by the research objectives, at the cost of further oppressing homeless people through setting an agenda. With this in mind I view the objectives in a broad manner and feel that all the information gained from the observations, interviews and general conversations is relevant to this study. However, to provide clarity I have synthesised and distilled the findings to provide a brief summary of my interpretations linked to the original research aims.

7.6.1 First Aim

> *To explore the benefits of, and challenges involved in, using ABCD as a method of facilitating increased involvement of homeless service users in a food distribution project.*

The benefits of using ABCD, as opposed to other methods to promote involvement, are difficult to quantify with any degree of certainty. However, I would argue that the findings suggest that undertaking a strength-based approach in conjunction with a needs-based approach has the potential to deliver a strategy for promoting and sustaining a higher degree of involvement for homeless people. For example, through accepting that homeless people have strengths and gifts to give to the community HtH was able to offer a small number of homeless people the opportunity to be involved with the services that they use. The homeless people involved reported experiencing benefits in their sense of self-worth and mental well-being, achievements that should not be understated. Some of the homeless people involved have undertaken further

roles within HtH, including one person becoming a member of the board, or have volunteered at other organisations. Although it is too early to make a definitive judgement, there is also the possibility that other homeless people may feel empowered to volunteer through the example of others making a difference.

The challenges involved in using ABCD have at times appeared complex and insurmountable. However, upon reflection many of the challenges have been exacerbated by internal factors at HtH: for example, the precarious financial position of the organisation coupled with a low level of morale among many of the volunteers demanded a great deal of time and patience in moving beyond an outlook of negativity to envisage possibilities for positive change. The building from which HtH operates also forms a formidable barrier to promoting opportunities for change, with regards to service delivery, challenging negativity, and for homeless people to become active participants.

Despite the barriers and challenges, on balance the implementation of ABCD at HtH demonstrates a limited success. Homeless people were given the opportunity to become involved and the level of involvement did increase and appears capable of being maintained. Unfortunately, the overall level of participation will remain low due to the limitations of the organisation's resources as regards to space and financial reserves. Notwithstanding these limitations, the opportunities for further development have been highlighted by homeless people participating in areas beyond the food project. With hindsight, I would argue that the food project was not the ideal project for promoting participation. The environment at HtH does not create the space for people to build relationships and the limited space demanded that opportunities for participation remained limited. I would argue that the URC site provided a possibility for participation that was sadly rejected by the church volunteers. I have made recommendations to the board to investigate possible alternatives for homeless people to participate and that such discussions should preferably led by homeless people. However, ultimately, due to the structural nature of homelessness methods such as ABCD by definition will arguably be limited to providing a measure of amelioration without challenging the root causes of homelessness and other forms of community development may offer a more critical approach.

7.6.2   Second Aim

To investigate the wider applicability of the ABCD based model as a means of enhancing service user involvement of homeless people.

To expand upon the discussion of Aim 1, the prospect for wider applicability is underpinned by the development of genuine opportunities for promoting involvement and collaboration with homeless people. As regards the research, opportunities for the involvement of homeless people were developed both internally at HtH and externally through the organisation of ultra running events in support of The Foxton Centre (Preston) and HtH. Furthermore, the recent addition of a time bank scheme at HtH is being considered as something that could assist in developing opportunities and incentives for homeless people to become more active in HtH. During interviews with Chorley Borough Council's Housing Department, it emerged that promoting homeless service user involvement is an area that they would be keen to see developed and that they were aware of the ABCD method of working. There may be a possibility for exploring collaborative working and thus possibly gaining a level of funding for developing homeless service user involvement strategies in partnership with the council. My personal reservation would be that becoming too involved with statutory providers could compromise HtH's impartiality and homeless people may lose trust and confidence in HtH, which could ironically result in a reduction in participation. Furthermore, although I am pragmatic in my beliefs that HtH can use the ABCD label to access funding I remain sceptical as to the actual benefit of implementing it within the organisation as opposed to implementing other methods, such as taking a Freirean community development inspired approach, which I feel would have greater benefit for all involved with HtH and the wider community.

7.6.3   Third Aim

To critically examine the theoretical assumptions underpinning ABCD and detail how they impact upon ABCD in practice.

I remain unconvinced about the merits of the ABCD model. I strongly believe in the benefits of taking a strength-based, or positive, approach when working with marginalised or oppressed people; however, ABCD as a model of community development arguably offers little that is unique from other development strategies. I

would argue that both a strength and weakness of ABCD may be found in the lack of a genuinely coherent theory underpinning the method. Strength-based approaches, which are evident in many forms of community development and practice, have arguably been subsumed under the ABCD label.

The research demonstrates that, in the case of HtH, ABCD has been generally understood and implemented through the lens of a theory for promoting individual change and development: to help homeless people gain in confidence, skills and well-being as a means to reintegrate them into society and access employment and housing opportunities. Whilst these aims may have a positive impact upon the lives of individual homeless people, they do little to challenge homelessness as a social issue and, as has been highlighted in the research, may actually work to suppress forms of solidarity and increase marginalisation through generating images of deserving and undeserving people. It is the lack of any acknowledgement or critique of the operation of power and oppression within the theory of ABCD which makes me question the necessity for taking on board the aspects of the theory that are beneficial while remaining critical and aware of the operation of power. The research findings demonstrating a rejection of the notion of a 'homeless community' highlight the problematic issue of undertaking an ABCD approach when there may be no identifiable community to develop. Perhaps concentrating on consciousness raising strategies challenging the structural causes of homelessness, and wider forms of oppression could strengthen levels of community cohesion and identification with others suffering through forms of oppression. I would argue that there is a need to further develop a theory for a critical strength-based approach to community development and participation.

7.7   Reflections

During my interview for the PhD I was asked why I wanted to undertake the PhD and what I wished to use it for. I had given this much thought prior to looking into the possibility of doing PhD research and my answer was that I wished to learn the necessary research skills to assist in making me more critically aware and consequently more able to work with homeless people and the wider community. I feel that I have

achieved this aim and am now more confident, knowledgeable and able to argue for and present alternatives that offer homeless people a more active and equitable role within the services they use.

I would describe my feelings of the overall research process as struggling to situate myself within a context of ever shifting boundaries. The space I had chosen to inhabit as a researcher/volunteer felt unstable and often unwelcoming. I often felt a struggle between my instincts to shout about the injustices I perceived and the reality of taking a strategic position to fight a larger battle. This struggle was brought home most clearly through my efforts to constantly reign in my sense of anger within my writing. One of my supervisors was a particular and constant source of support in highlighting instances when my anger possibly overcame my academic reasoning, and he allowed me the space to work this through with him and to specifically reflect upon this potential conflict, and rewrite if I eventually decided this was necessary. The author and activist bell hooks provided the following insight that perfectly captures my feelings:

> *'Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often impoverished. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice. For me this space of radical openness is a margin – a profound edge. Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a "safe" place. One is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance'* (hooks, 1991, p.206).

I feel the research has been a journey of self-discovery as much as an investigation into ABCD and HtH. I have tested myself and pushed myself far beyond my comfort zone and I believe I have grown as a person throughout the process. It has not been without challenges and at times the pressure has felt almost suffocating. I have had many sleepless nights struggling with my belief in supporting and befriending homeless people and the reality that while undertaking the research I was being pulled away from this role. Seeing the disappointment in the faces of some of the homeless people I knew when I explained that I could not be involved in taking up some of the issues they raised while I was doing the research made me question my sense of ethics. Was I beginning to put the research before the people it was designed to assist? Was the

role of researcher compatible with that of volunteers and which one was I at any particular moment?

I feel that I have been complicit in maintaining often exclusionary practices through not always challenging forms of social injustice to the full in my working practice. I recall an experience as a new volunteer where I was reprimanded for challenging the local council's rough sleeper estimates. I was told that HtH must remain a non-political organisation and it depended upon council funding. As a consequence of the research I now believe that there is no position that is apolitical and to not challenge oppressive practice and sources of inequality is to justify them tacitly. I am aware that many people at HtH and the URC insist that their practice is founded upon Christian values and they believe that politics has no place within a charity environment. However, I find this position untenable as the Church of England has become increasingly more vocal and political in its stance against growing levels of inequality:

> *'Arguing that it was the Church's role to "speak truth to power", Dr Sentamu, who chairs the Living Wage Commission, attacked UK political parties for trying to outdo each other "not with a vision of justice but with appeals to individual preference, interest and consumer choice.*
>
> *"While many have benefited from the economic progress of past decades, the consequences of this rampant consumerism and individualism — both economic and social — have been to eradicate the glue that holds communities together"'* (Warrel, Pickard & Barrett, 2015).

To compound my doubts Tony Martin, a long-term volunteer and a very dear friend who was instrumental in setting the agenda for change at HtH developed a terminal illness and tragically passed away during the time I was researching. His belief in the strengths and decency of homeless people was an inspiration and his loss dealt a huge blow to maintaining a positive environment for developing change at HtH. Tony saw ABCD as both a stepping-stone and a "Trojan horse" to use in helping homeless people gain a measure of access and power within HtH. However, for Tony, homelessness was a travesty that was caused by a political and economic system that needed to be understood and challenged. He was incredibly supportive of the research and insisted it remain critical, even when this challenged our own working practices and beliefs. He

insisted that we continue to strive for change for homeless people and that even if it did not occur quickly, or even ever, at HtH then it must be struggled for elsewhere. I agree with Tony's prescient analysis of homelessness being intrinsically linked to the hegemony of neo-liberal ideology that drives up levels of inequality and promotes greed and competition as the ultimate virtues. Like Tony, I feel that we must use any and all tools at our disposal to challenge neo-liberal hegemony and resist its ever permeating spread into all areas of social, economic and political life. Only by setting our practice in the context of this wider agenda can we truly challenge forms of oppression and promote a genuine form of solidarity and equality.

Some of the things I have uncovered during the research and reported have made me feel that I am in a sense 'betraying' the organisation I have worked with for so long. However, I justify this by viewing it as a self-criticism; I am as much a part of HtH as any other volunteer and any weaknesses or issues are as much my responsibility as anyone else involved. I do feel that my relationships with some of the volunteers have become difficult as an outcome of the research and returning to volunteer will be a process requiring a great deal of renegotiation and transition. Emotionally the research has left me with some wounds that may take some time to heal but on reflection this is a price worth paying to have been involved in trying to give homeless people a voice and becoming part of a process that may provide the opportunity for us all at HtH to engage together and create a positive environment for change. As this thesis is driven by my desire to give homeless people more of a voice and a say in their own lives and the services they use I feel it is fitting to conclude with the words of a homeless person who during our conversations gave voice to my feelings:

> *"You see, they can keep on putting me down and shitting on me and all that but I tell you what, I know that one day people might think different. Things are getting tougher for people who are poor and I just want people to realise that we are you, just you got the luck and we didn't."*

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOGRAPHS

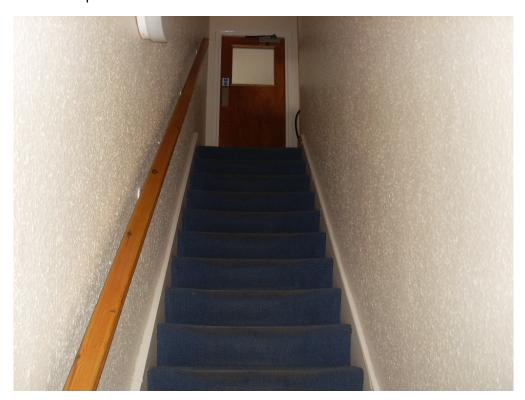Picture 1: Help the Homeless Offices: Exterior

referred to in Section 1.3, page 12; Section 5.3.1, page 168

Picture 2: Help the Homeless: Reception Area

Referred to in Section 1.3, page 12; Section 5.3.1, page 168; Section 6.9.3, page 237

Picture 3: Help the Homeless: Stairs View 1

Referred to in Section 1.3, page 13; Section 5.3.1, page 173
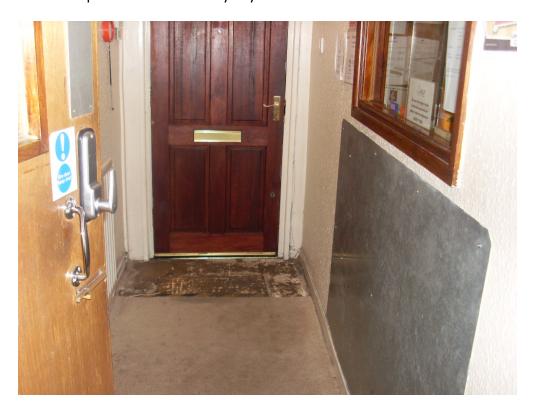
Picture 4: Help the Homeless: Kitchen View 1

Referred to in Section 1.3, page 13; Section 5.3.1, page 170

Picture 5: Help the Homeless: Kitchen View 2

Referred to in Section 1.3, page 13; Section 5.3.1, page 170

Picture 6: Help the Homeless: Reception Screen

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 168; Section 6.9.3, page 237

Picture 7: Help the Homeless: Entryway

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 168; Section5.6, page 184

Picture 8: Help the Homeless: Reception/Downstairs Office

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 170
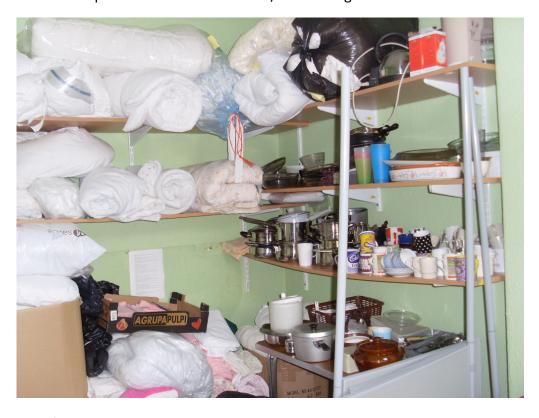
Picture 9: Help the Homeless Stairs View 2

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 173

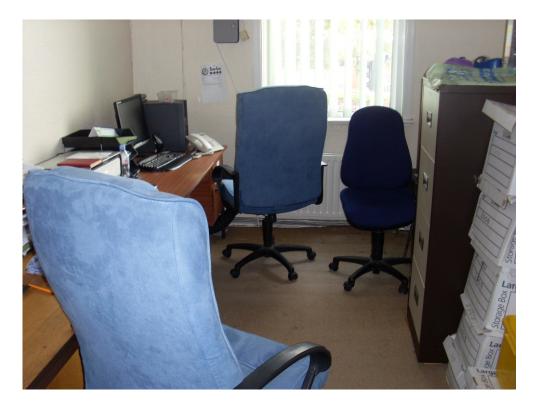Picture 10: Help the Homeless: Mediation/Counselling Room View 1

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 173

Picture 11: Help the Homeless: Mediation/Counselling Room View 2

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 173

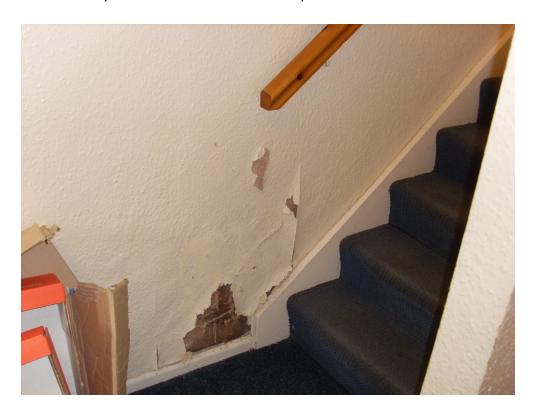Picture 12: Help the Homeless: Upstairs Staff Office

Referred to in Section 5.3.1, page 174

Picture 13: Chorley United Reform Church: Exterior

Referred to in Section 5.3.2, page 175

Picture 14: Help the Homeless: State of Disrepair

Referred to in Section 5.6, page 184

Picture 15: Ian Tolson with Alistair Jewell at The Foxton 24 Hour Race

Referred to in Section 8.5, page 257