

# Hidden homelessness amongst women: Gender informed services that lead to Growth

---

- **The Context and Prevalence of Multiple Disadvantage**  
*Justine Adams, Strategic Commissioning Manager, Changing Futures Programme Manager, Sheffield City Council*
- **Women's Rough Sleeping Census: A National Picture**  
*Eleanor Greenhalgh, Women's Rough Sleeping Policy Manager, Solace Women's Aid*
- **Women's Rough Sleeping Census: Sheffield, Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City**  
*Aimee Lowe, Service Manager, Framework Housing Association*
- **The Growth Project**  
*Linsay Hurst, Head of Development, Target Housing*
- **Q&A Panel**



# Context and Prevalence - Multiple Disadvantage

**Justine Adams**  
***Strategic Commissioning Manager***  
***Changing Futures Programme***  
***Manager***

# Defining Multiple Disadvantage

People experiencing Multiple Disadvantage (MD) often face numerous and complex challenges concurrently.

*“Experiencing three or more out of the following, homelessness, substance use, poor mental health, contact with the criminal justice system or a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse and whose combined effect places an individual at risk of becoming, or remaining at risk of, further harm, trauma or institutionalisation”*

Wider health and socio-economic challenges this cohort experiences include:

- Physical health conditions which impact quality of life
- Removal of children
- Acquired brain injuries (ABI)
- Poverty

Multiple Disadvantage and the wider challenges disproportionately affect socially excluded and stigmatised cohorts, including those identified within NHS England’s [Health Inclusion Framework](#):

- Vulnerable migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers
- Sex workers
- Victims of modern slavery or trafficking

# Severe and Multiple Disadvantage



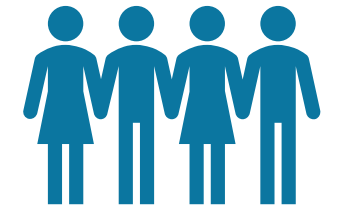
**Multiplicity  
and  
interlocking**



**'Revolving  
Door'**



**Trauma and  
ACEs**



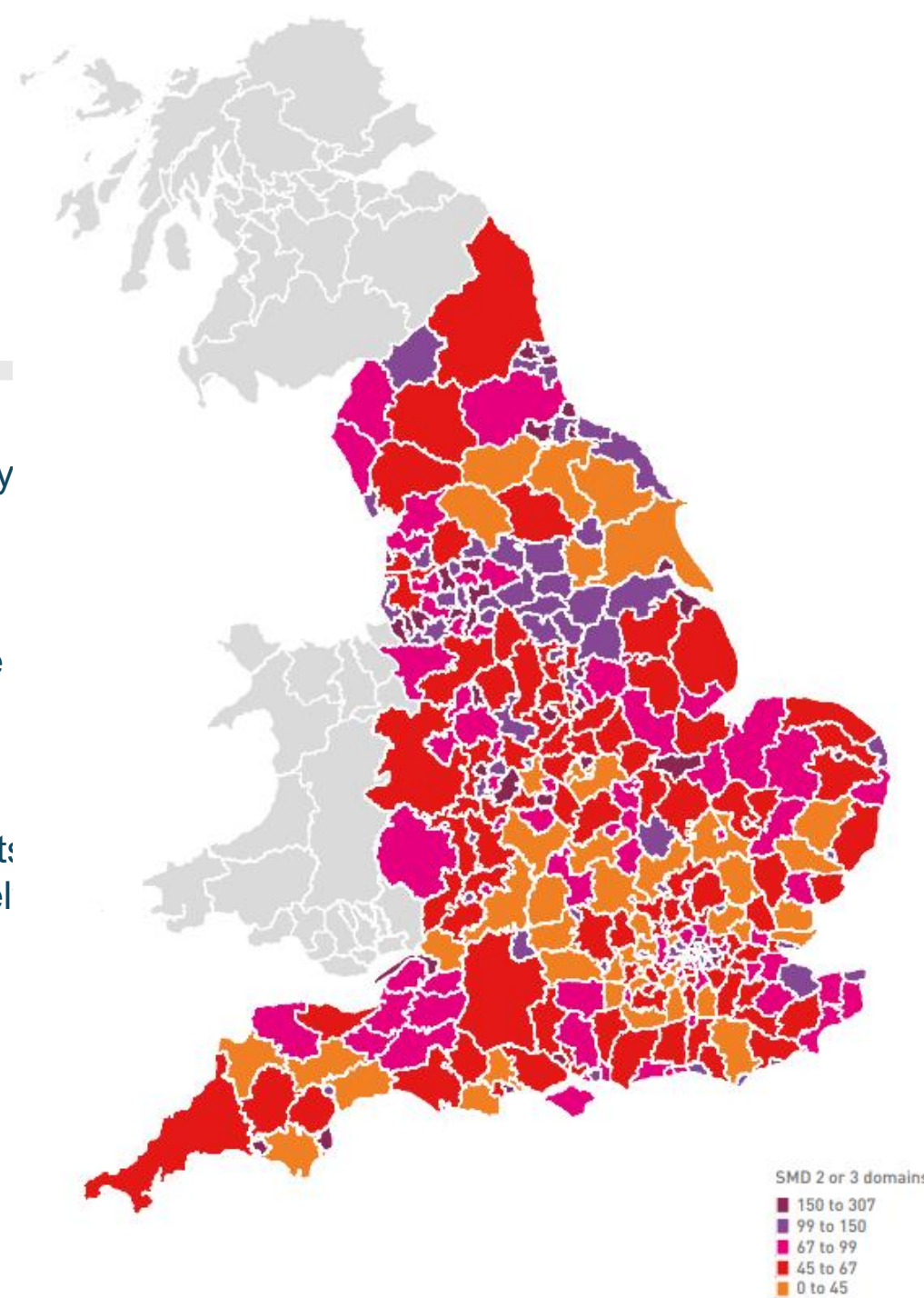
**Isolation and  
stigma**

# Prevalence of Severe and Multiple Disadvantage

Sheffield – 3,000 people experiencing Multiple Disadvantage across the city and approximately 10-15% require more support than is provided

Hard Edges 2015 - Average Local Authority estimated to have 1,470 active SMD cases per year however this did not include domestic abuse

Gender Matters 2020 – Data from across 2010-2014 - Around 336,000 adults affected by three or four primary domains. Of these, there were approximately the same number of women and men. The number experiencing the most complex disadvantage (all four domains) in a single year appeared to be comparatively small (17,000, of whom around 70% were female)



# Women's Rough Sleeping Census

A national overview: 2022-2024

---

Eleanor Greenhalgh  
Solace Women's Aid



Single  
Homeless  
Project



Change  
Grow  
Live

# Women's homelessness – is it visible?

## **Women's homelessness can take visible and less visible forms**

- Sofa surfing; domestic abuse and VAWG; sex working; 'survival' sex or 'sex for rent'; exploitation, trafficking and modern slavery; refuge and charity funded support; informal arrangements – including separation from children.

## **Women's rough sleeping can also be less visible**

- Walking around all night; sheltering in concealed locations, A&Es, public transport, McDonald's; concealing gender; sex working at night; staying with strangers.

**Women can also alternate between various forms of homelessness, whether hidden or visible – this means it might be harder to offer consistent support within current systems.**

# What's the impact?



- Current nationwide data collection and structures of services and processes can mean many of these experiences go unseen and unaccounted for.
- Women can also feel uncomfortable accessing services – e.g. due to lack of trust and high levels of male attendance – again making women less visible and less able to access support.
- **The impact?**

Women are underrepresented in commissioning and designing services, funding, policies and practices.

This means that processes and services aren't designed for women and there aren't enough services for women.

Women are remaining homeless, unsafe and in need for much longer than necessary – sometimes resulting in lifelong or entrenched homelessness and disadvantage.



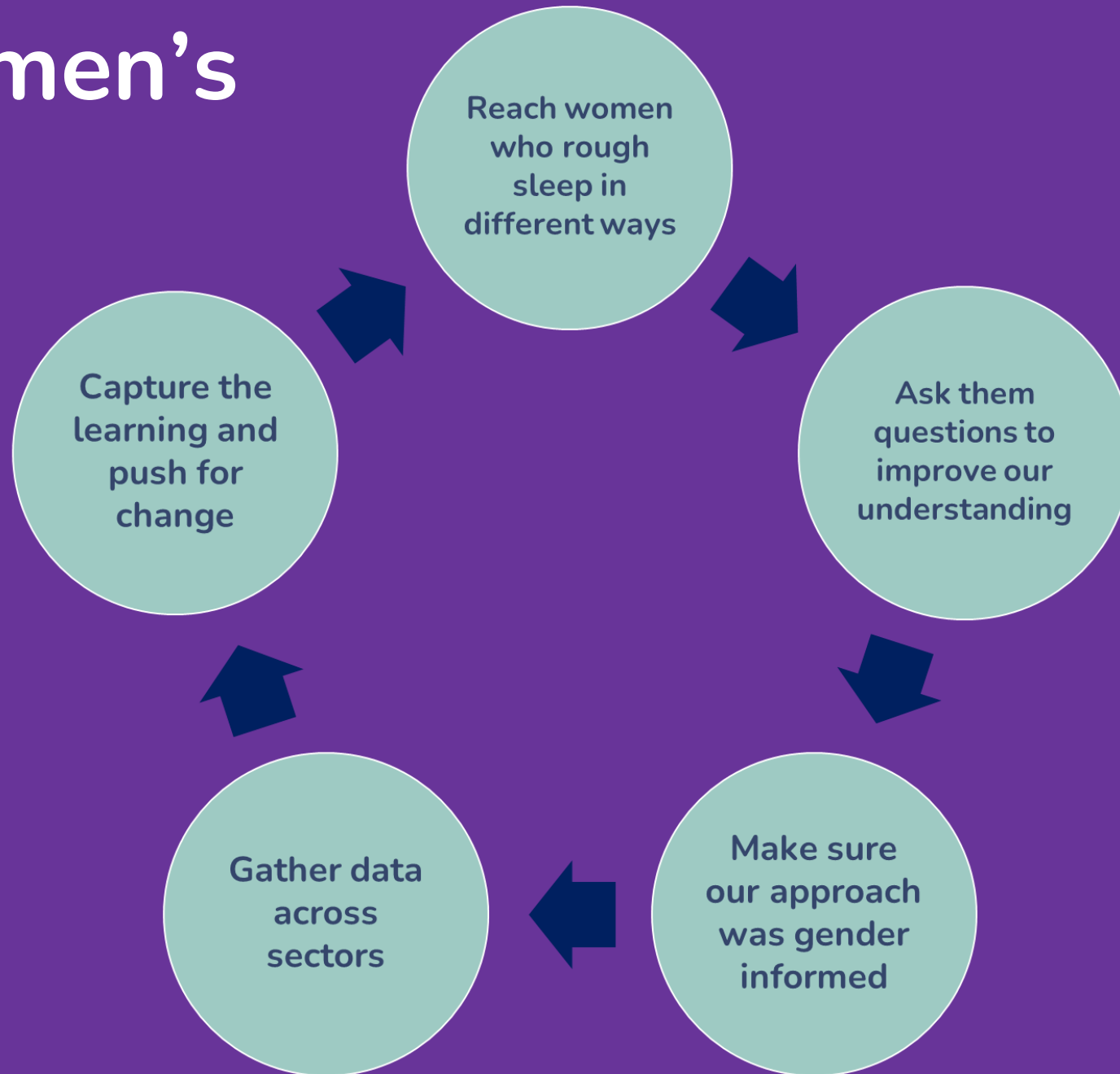
# Women's Voices - 2024 Women's Rough Sleeping Census

Watch video on YouTube

[https://youtu.be/tuWJAdRr2lw?si=n6PW08Hw\\_ynuP23P](https://youtu.be/tuWJAdRr2lw?si=n6PW08Hw_ynuP23P)



# Why a women's census?



# Women's Rough Sleeping Census methodology

## Challenge

Women are less likely to bed down visibly on the streets as they conceal themselves due to constant high risk of violence. This means they are often not seen in rough sleeping counts and not 'verified' as sleeping rough.

Women are even less visible to outreach at night as this is the most dangerous time for them. They will walk all night, sex work in flats or hotels, or accept high-risk offers of shelter from strangers from rather than face the streets at night.

Women's patterns of rough sleeping are transient and intermittent – meaning snapshot counts are highly likely to underrepresent them and traditional outreach shifts are unlikely to result in them being found and verified.

Women are often known to non outreach/housing services (health, Violence Against Women and Girls, substance use), but data is not shared between these sectors.

Rough sleeping provision has been designed for how men sleep rough. Understanding and recognition of how women sleep rough is limited.

## Approach

Created guidance for outreach to direct them to look in places women and research tell us they shelter/sleep – stations, 24 hour cafes, hospital toilets and waiting rooms.

Outreach advised to conduct day shifts in order to find women they could never access at night.

Data collection window 7 days and women asked about experiences over the past 3 months. Survey to determine circumstances rather than needing to see the respondent in a particular place.

The census includes all services and sectors who support or encounter women who sleep rough, in order to build an inclusive data picture.

The census goes beyond counting and asks women questions to better understand their circumstances. We now have a body of data from over 800 women in England telling us how, when and where they sleep rough.

# How does the Women's Rough Sleeping Census work?



1

## Census survey

A 10-question survey is completed with women who may have experienced rough sleeping recently.

The survey is conducted by a range of services and during gender-informed outreach.

2

## Local insights meetings

A range of local services meet to submit the numbers of women they support and discuss key challenges they face in supporting women in their local area.

# Facts and figures

**2000** women reached in years 1,2 and 3

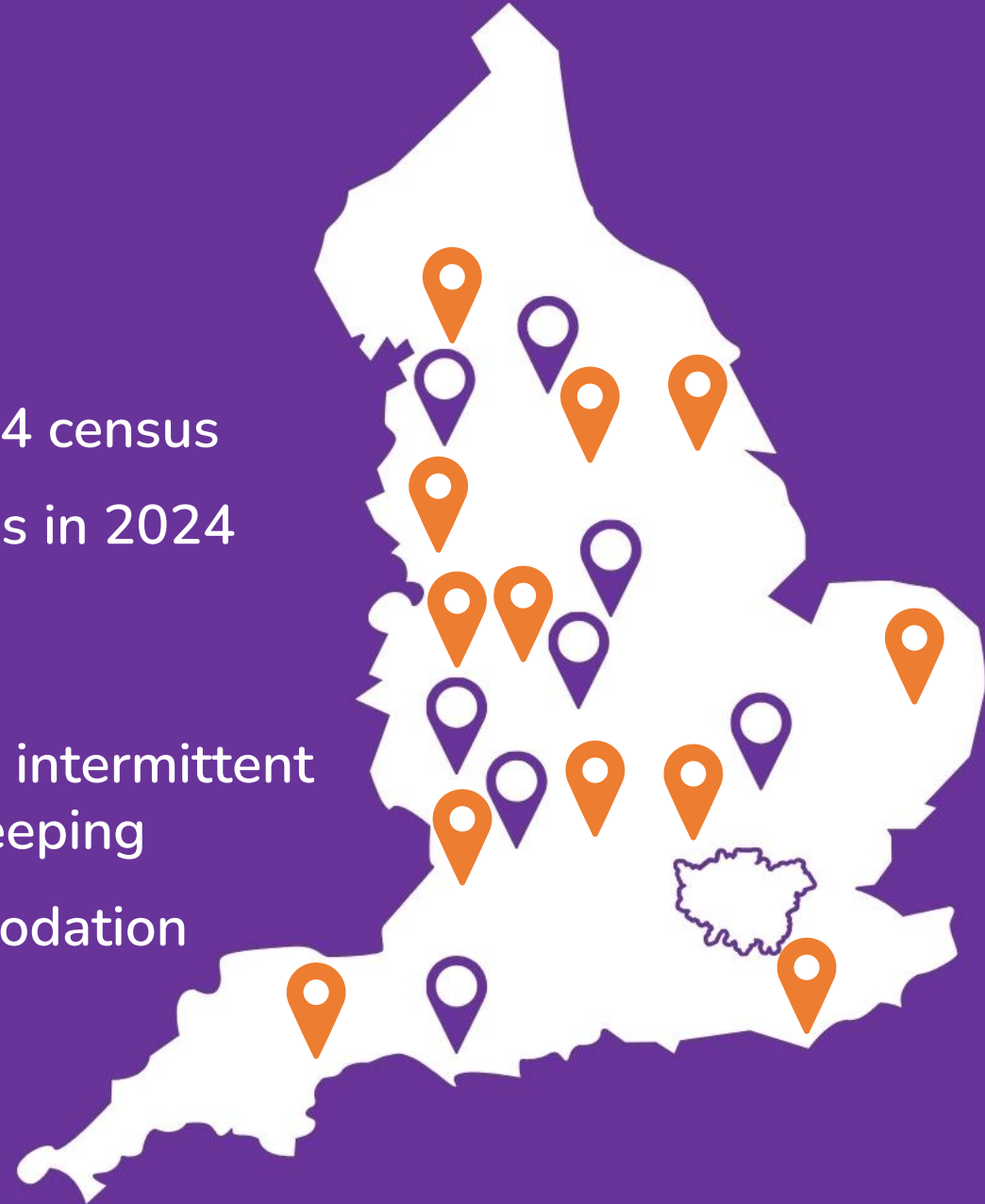
**88** local authorities took part in year 3

**1014** women found in **88** local authorities in the 2024 census

**41** local authorities conducted local insights meetings in 2024

## Researchers found...

- Women's experiences tend to be hidden, transient, intermittent and fall outside Government definition of rough sleeping
- **1/3** of women previously in homelessness accommodation



# What do the census data tell us? 2023 example

	2023 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	Gender-informed women's census
London	159	391
Greater Manchester	5	188
Gloucestershire	0	21
Coventry	1	61
All 2023 census areas	189	815
England	568 (317 local authorities)	815 (41 local authorities)

The census allows us to build up more evidence than ever before. But it's about more than numbers...



## Interpersonal and relational

- Improved relationships
- Cross-sector collaboration
- Increased understanding and awareness

## Services and practice change

- 4 new women's accommodation services
- 2 funding applications for accommodation
- 4 new women's drop ins
- 1 new winter women's service
- 1 new specialist women's support role
- Focus groups of service users reviewing service provision
- New multi-agency case conference groups
- Change to outreach shift, verification and casework practices in over 10 boroughs

## Local and combined authorities, and national impact

- New local authority training offers
- Creation of new gender-informed resources for and by teams
- New policy papers and strategies recommending changes
- Gender-informed amendments to KPIs and data collection
- Identification of particularly at risk and underserved groups
- Onto the agenda at strategic and operational levels
- Ministerial visits, departmental meetings and support
- Press coverage – television, radio, print

# Women's Rough Sleeping Census Manifesto for Change:

## Five steps for tackling women's homelessness in MHCLG's national strategy

The logo for 'solace' is a red square with the word 'solace' in white lowercase letters.

**Single  
Homeless  
Project**

Women's homelessness is compounded by systemic neglect, with homelessness policies, funding, practices and services failing to recognise and respond to how **women** experience homelessness. Violence and abuse are near universal experiences for women experiencing homelessness, and homelessness accommodation is often inaccessible and unsafe. Many women are further marginalised by the structural, systemic and service level barriers that impact Black and minoritised and migrant women, and women who identify as LGBTQ+.

Despite the prevalence of women in statutory homelessness figures, and recent census data showing women's rough sleeping is 9 times higher than government estimates, there



# The five key steps

1. Definition
2. Data
3. Equity and Safety
4. Integration
5. Prevention and Intervention

**Definition:** England's homelessness strategy should be configured around an understanding of how women experience homelessness and rough sleeping.

## Challenge

*"The 2023 census provides data from over 800 women across England. This reveals that women's experiences of rough sleeping tend to be hidden, transient and intermittent and that both the locations and how women sleep rough frequently fall outside of the Government's definition."*

Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2023

**“** I was scared to sleep outside in case anything bad happened to me. I think a lot of girls choose random places to stay, and there are a lot of homeless women. **”**



# National Women's Rough Sleeping Manifesto



## 1. Definition

England's homelessness strategy should be configured around an understanding of how women experience homelessness and rough sleeping.

## 2. Data

The Government should provide local authorities with tools, resources and guidance to ensure they gather accurate and inclusive data on women's homelessness.

## 3. Equity and Safety

The Government should provide guidance and ringfenced funding to enable local authorities to ensure their homelessness services and systems are equitable, accessible and safe for women.

# National Women's Rough Sleeping Manifesto



## **4. Integration**

Government departments should develop cross-sector strategies and funding programmes to enable women experiencing homelessness to access support as quickly as possible, no matter where in the system they present.

## **5. Prevention and intervention**

The Government should invest in new approaches to ensure that women are provided with information and resources to prevent and resolve their homelessness and are provided safe and accessible support.

# Report launch

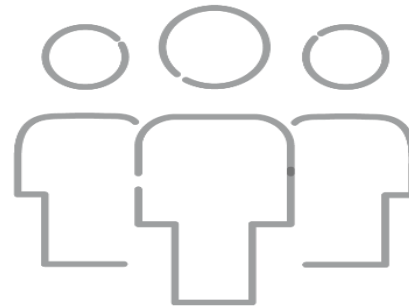


- **We will be launching our full report on the 2024 National Women's Rough Sleeping Census on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> June.**
- **Join us to hear from researchers and local authorities across England, as well as quotes from women themselves.**
- **Details will be released this week.**

# Women's Census outcomes Sheffield, Notts County and Nottingham City 2024

**Aimee Lowe**

- Service Manager
- 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025



# About Framework Outreach

- 3 teams – Sheffield, Notts County and Nottingham City
- Working with individuals who find themselves sleeping rough
- 365 days outreach
- Verifying individuals to the local authority
- Provide data to the local authority and MHCLG
- Continuous offer of support
- Working in a multi-agency way
- Offering bespoke support to individuals



# census compared to those sleeping rough

## **Women's census**

Having nowhere safe to stay at all: for example, sleeping outside on the ground or in a tent, sitting/sleeping in places which are open late or 24/7 (such as fast-food restaurants and hospitals), walking all night, sex working at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, using drugs in other people's accommodation at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, etc.

Women may not do this every night, and rough sleeping may be interspersed with other forms of hidden homelessness such as staying in accommodation belonging to unsafe/unknown people/perpetrators, staying in 'cuckooed' flats, or staying with friends/family/associates on a very insecure and transitory basis (e.g. nightly or weekly, or regularly being forced to leave immediately)

## **Rough sleeping**

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').

# What we did

- Sheffield and County 2<sup>nd</sup> year, City 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Guided by Solace Womens aid – this is country wide project
- Working group
- Gathered services who work directly with women to take part
- Pamper packs
- Area specific questionnaire
- Work out locations to target in Census week

## **2 parts of census**

- Data gathering – set week in September
- Data analysis – data meeting



# Outcomes – Quantitative data

## Sheffield

- 182 individuals met the definition from 8 services
- Once duplicates removed (multiple services) it was 104.
- 78 women were known by 2-5 services – 57%
- Official headcount we found just 3 women out of 31 individuals sleeping rough

## County

- 79 Individuals met the definition from 12 Services
- Once duplicates removed it was 40
- 39 Women were known to 2-4 Services 49%
- Official headcount 2023 we found 6 Women out of 33 (25 found, 8 added in estimate meetings) individuals sleeping rough

## City

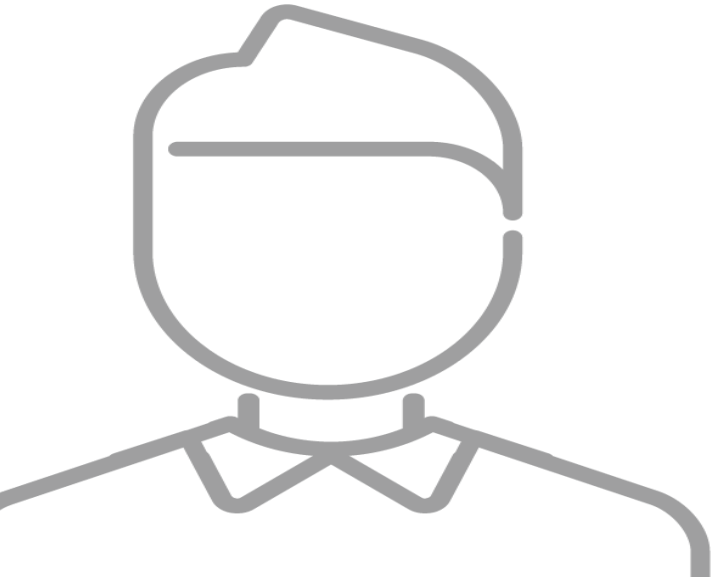
- 24 Individuals met the definition from 4 Services
- Once duplicates removed it was 20
- 4 Women were known to 2 Services
- Official headcount 2023 we found 5 Women out of 46 Individuals sleeping rough



**Framework**  
For your future

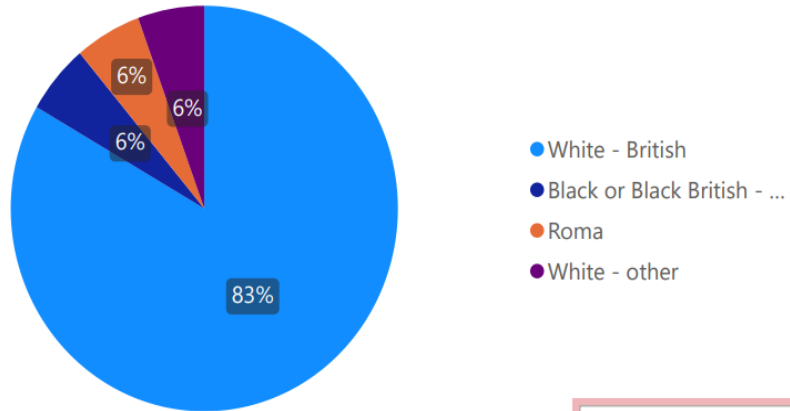
# Surveys completed

- Sheffield – 18 – increase from last year
  - Notts County – 22 – reduction from last year
  - Notts City – 14 – first year completing
- 
- Can show the difficulty in getting women to engage in this – pamper packs helped

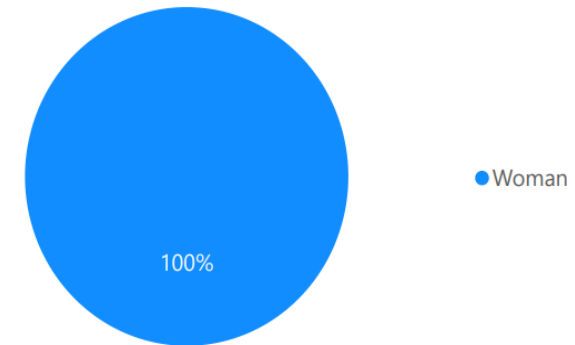


# Survey Results - Demographics

How would you describe your ethnicity?



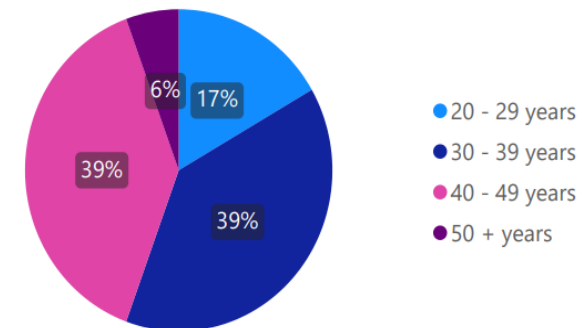
What is your gender?



Number of Respondants

18

How old were you on your last birthday? (groups)



## Demographics Summary

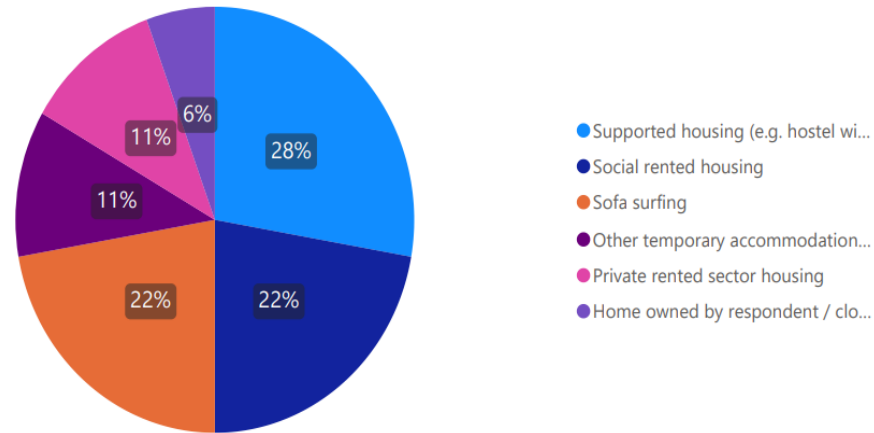
All respondents identified as women, one identified as a trans woman. 83% of respondents described their ethnicity as White British, and 18% were of minoritized ethnicities. The largest age group (78%) were aged in their 30s or 40s.



**Framework**  
For your future

# Where they have stayed most recently before rough sleeping

Where were you staying most recently before sleeping rough?



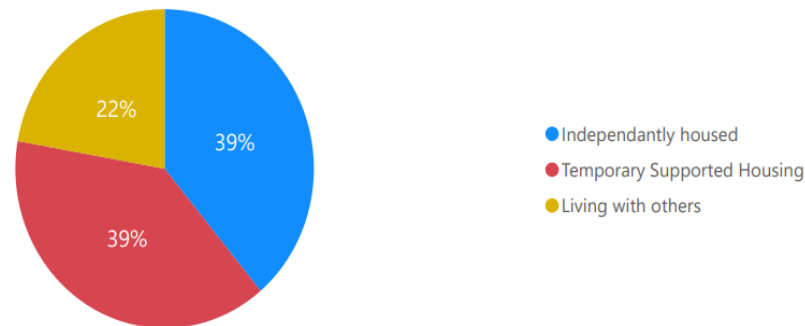
## Where people reported staying before rough sleeping

An equal amount (39%) of respondents reported living in temporary supported accommodation (homelessness services, hostels and refuges) and being independently housed (social rented, private rented and home ownership). A further 22% reported staying with others.

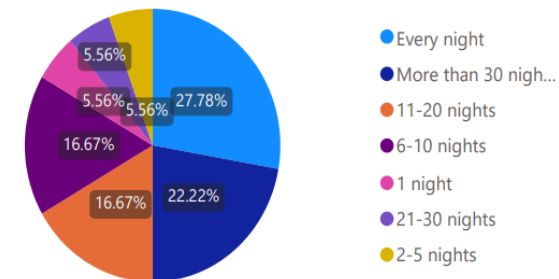
## The number of nights spent sleeping rough

Almost a third of the respondents reported sleeping rough every night in the previous three months, with a further 22% sleeping rough for more than 30 nights.

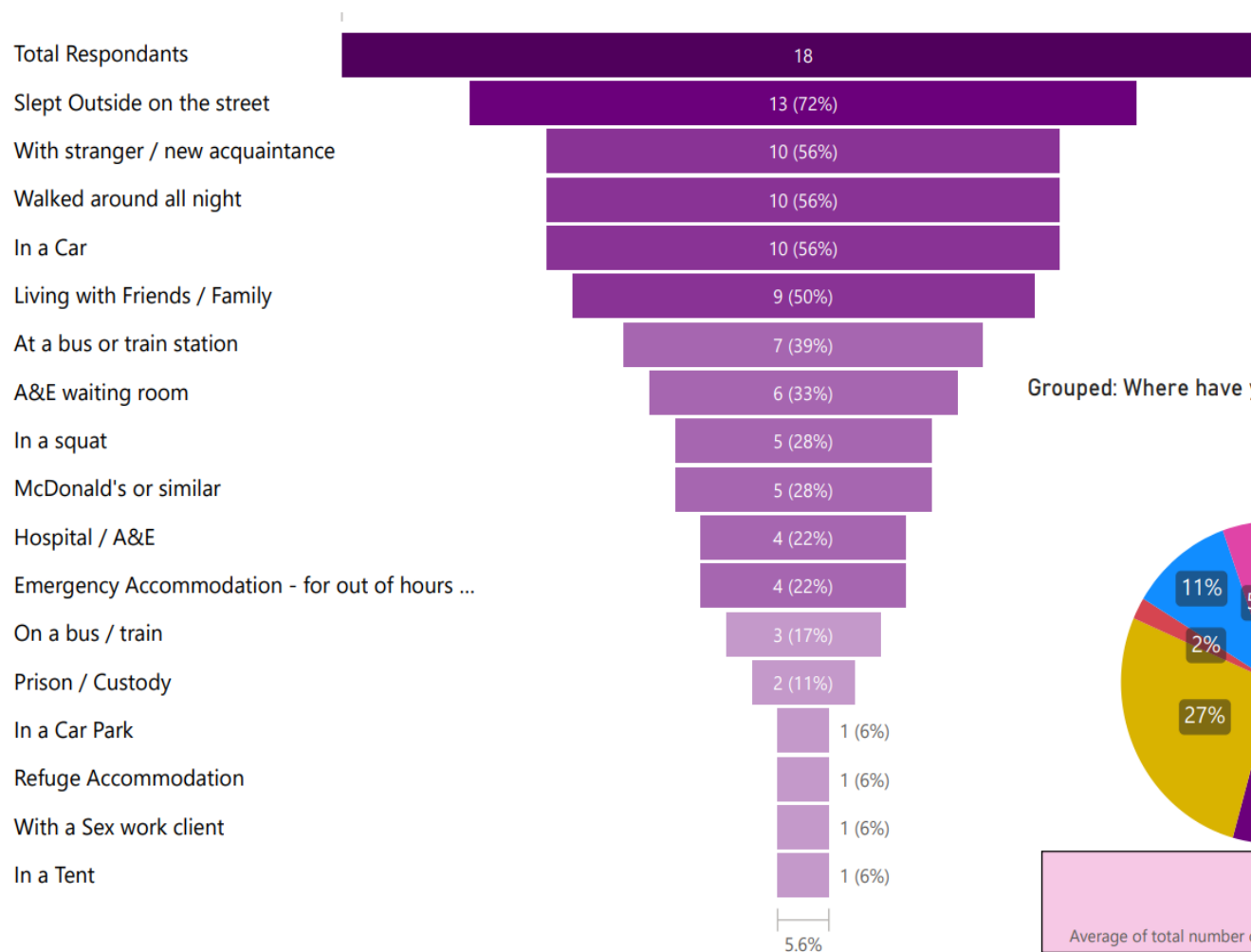
Grouped: Where were you staying most recently before sleeping rough?



Approximately how many nights have you slept rough in the last 3 months?



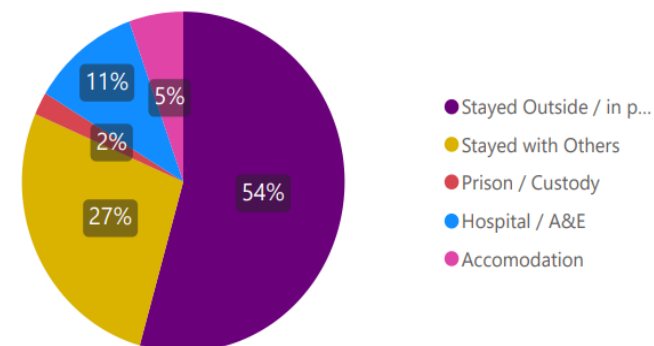
# Where stayed/slept in last 3 months



## Places stayed / slept in the past 3 months

The most common places respondents reported staying were outside on the street, or walking around all night, or other public places such as train stations, car parks and on a public transport. They also commonly reported staying with strangers. Notably only 5% of women reported staying in any kind of accommodation in the past 3 months.

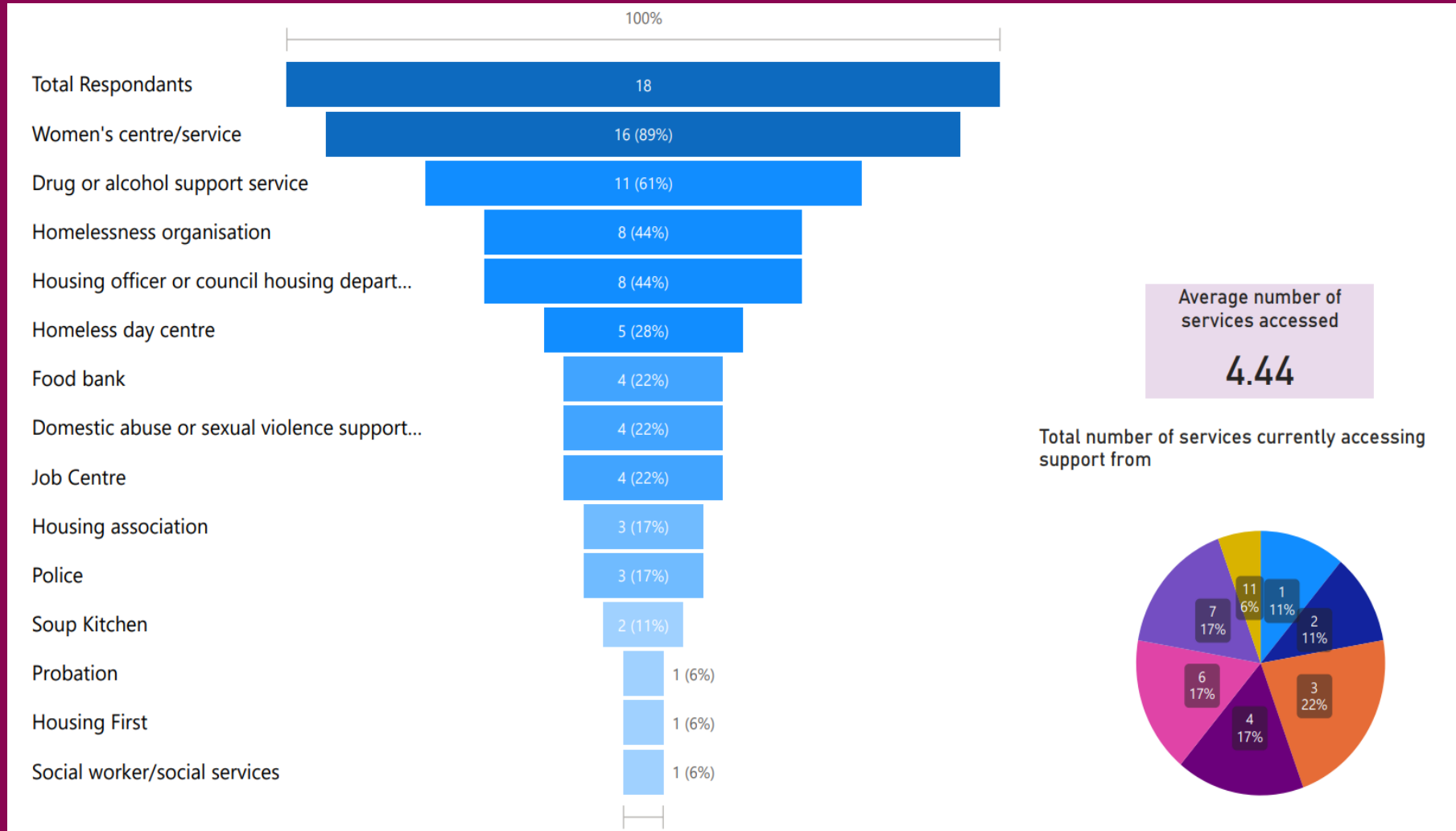
## Grouped: Where have you stayed / slept in the last 3 months?



5.39

Average of total number of different places stayed in the past 3 months

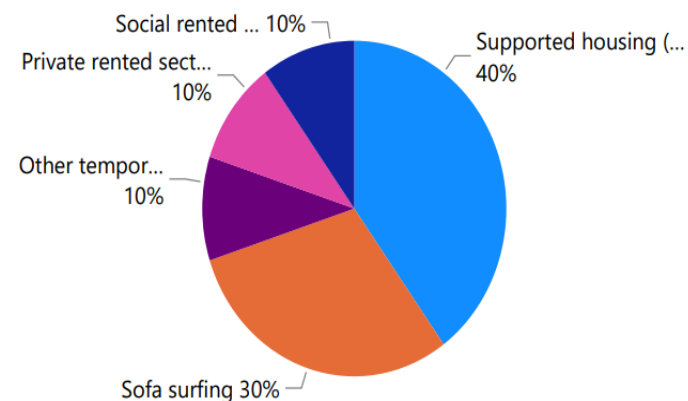
# Which services are you currently accessing support



**Framework**  
For your future

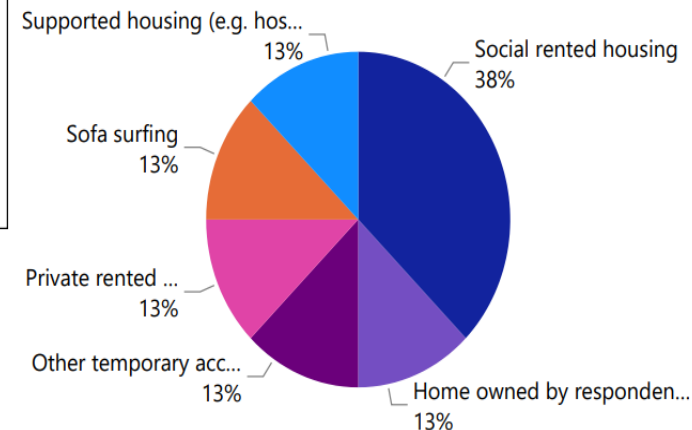
# Age Difference: Where stayed/ slept?

20 - 39 years old: Where were you staying most recently before sleeping rough?

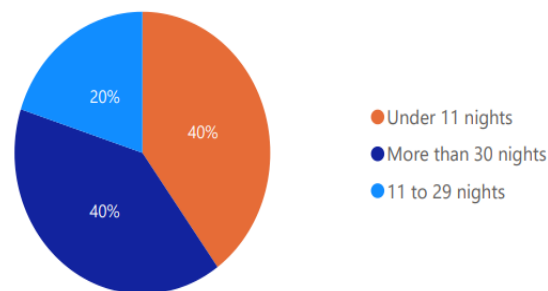


**Age Difference: where stayed**  
Women aged over 39 were more likely to be in long term accommodation before they slept rough: 64% of women over 39 were in social rented, private rented or owned their home, compared to only 20% of younger women.

40+ years old: Where were you staying most recently before sleeping rough?

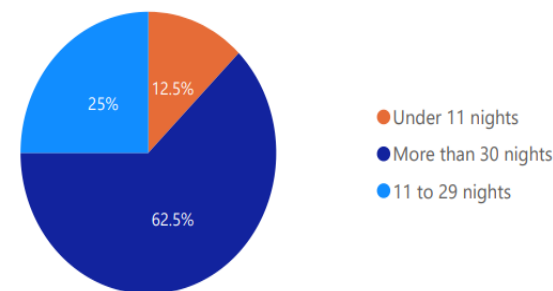


20 - 39 years old: Approximately how many nights have you slept rough in the last 3 months?

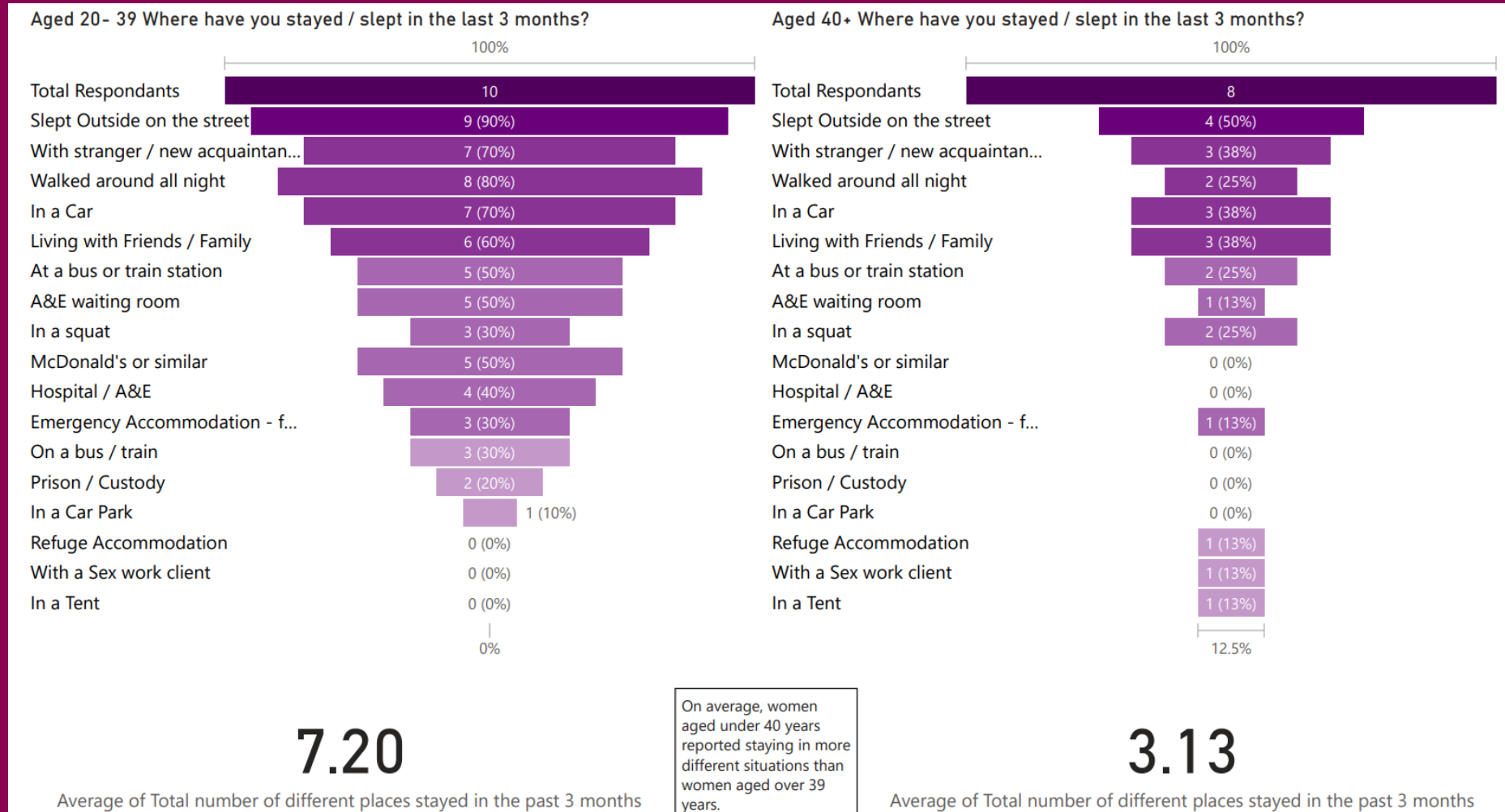


**Age Difference: number of nights**  
Women aged 40 and over reported spending more nights sleeping rough than younger women; only 12.5% of slept rough for less than 11 nights, compared with 40% of women under 40 sleeping rough less than 11 times in the past 3 months.

40+ years old: Approximately how many nights have you slept rough in the last 3 months?



# Age Difference: Number of places stayed / slept



**Framework**  
For your future

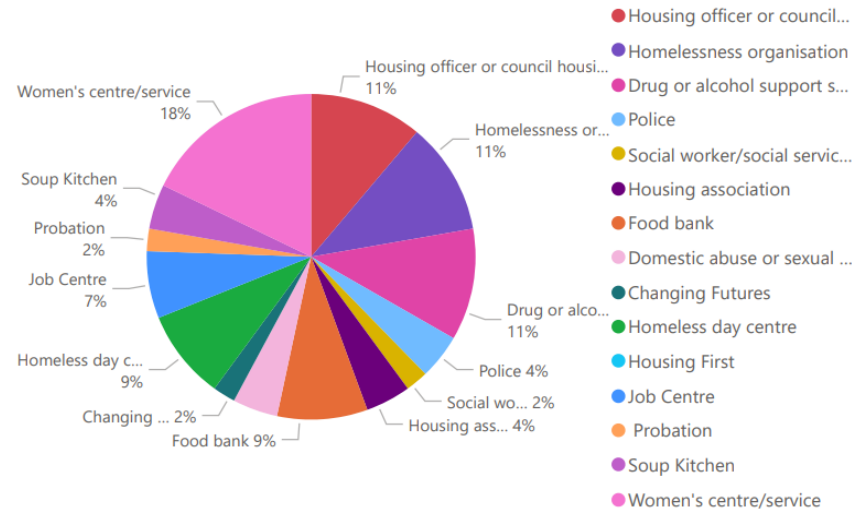


# Age Difference: Services accessed

20 to 39years: Which services are you currently accessing support from?

Average number of services accessed

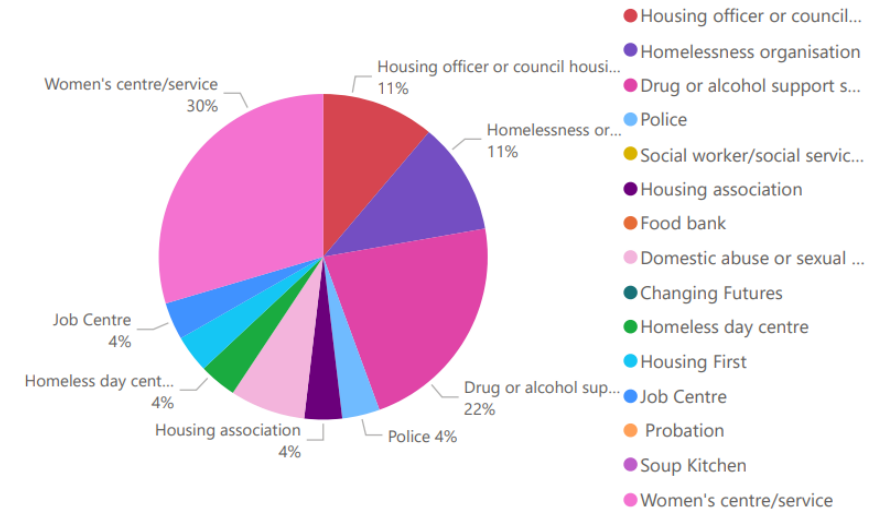
5.00



39+: Which services are you currently accessing support from?

Average number of services accessed

3.75



## Age Difference: Services

Women aged 40 and older were on average, accessing support from less services than those aged below 40, but were more likely to be receiving support from a drug or alcohol service. Women under 40 reported accessing food banks or soup kitchens, where's none of the women aged 40 and over reported accessing food-based support.

# Themes and Barriers

- Bad weather
- There are more women out there than we are able to work with
- Engage with set services – Non-statutory
- Women in couples (some abusive relationships) – can impact if we can complete the survey and how we work with them – co-dependency
- Pamper packs help with engagement
- Women are transient and stay in a lot of locations
- Women have much higher complex needs than male cohort
- There is a difference when broken down by age – Sheffield
- County – have no women's only hostels
- City – realised they needed a lot more planning than was put in – will use this for next years census
- City – felt it was unsuccessful as little buy in from other agencies



**Framework**  
For your future

# What's next

- All data shared with Solace Women's aid
- Women's census 2025
- Learn from this years census to improve next years
- Look at the way we are working to make improvements

# What are we doing differently

- Change the way we do outreach
- Use the data for future services
  - Women's activity navigator
  - volunteer and do drop in's in womens services
- SMD – domestic abuse worker – County

# **Multiple disadvantage and child removal**

[Justine.Adams@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:Justine.Adams@sheffield.gov.uk)





# CHILD REMOVAL

- National Legislation - Children Act (1989)
- Concerns relating to neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse
- Foster care, adoption or guardianship orders with family
- Amount of contact post removal varies



# PREVALENCE OF CHILD REMOVAL

In Sheffield between 2008-2022:

- 1,132 mothers of which 17% had multiple removals
- 90 **new** mothers and 135 **new** children per year experiencing removal for the first time
- First removal between 18-24, 23% experience multiple removals
- Women experiencing multiple disadvantage, these removals often occurred at birth.

# BIRTH MOTHERS AND RECURRENT CARE PROCEEDINGS

- Over half under the age of 24
- Quarter return to family court within 7 years
- 40% have been through the care system

*Broadhurst K., 2015, Connecting Events in Time to Identify a Hidden Population: Birth Mothers and Their Children in Recurrent Care Proceedings in England*

*Broadhurst K. et al, 2017, Vulnerable birth mothers and recurrent care proceedings*





# CHILD REMOVAL AS A GATEWAY TO FURTHER DISADVANTAGE

- Gateway to further disadvantage
- A trigger for an escalation of problems



*Broadhurst, 2019, Child removal as the gateway to further adversity:  
Birth mother accounts of the immediate and enduring collateral  
consequences of child removal*

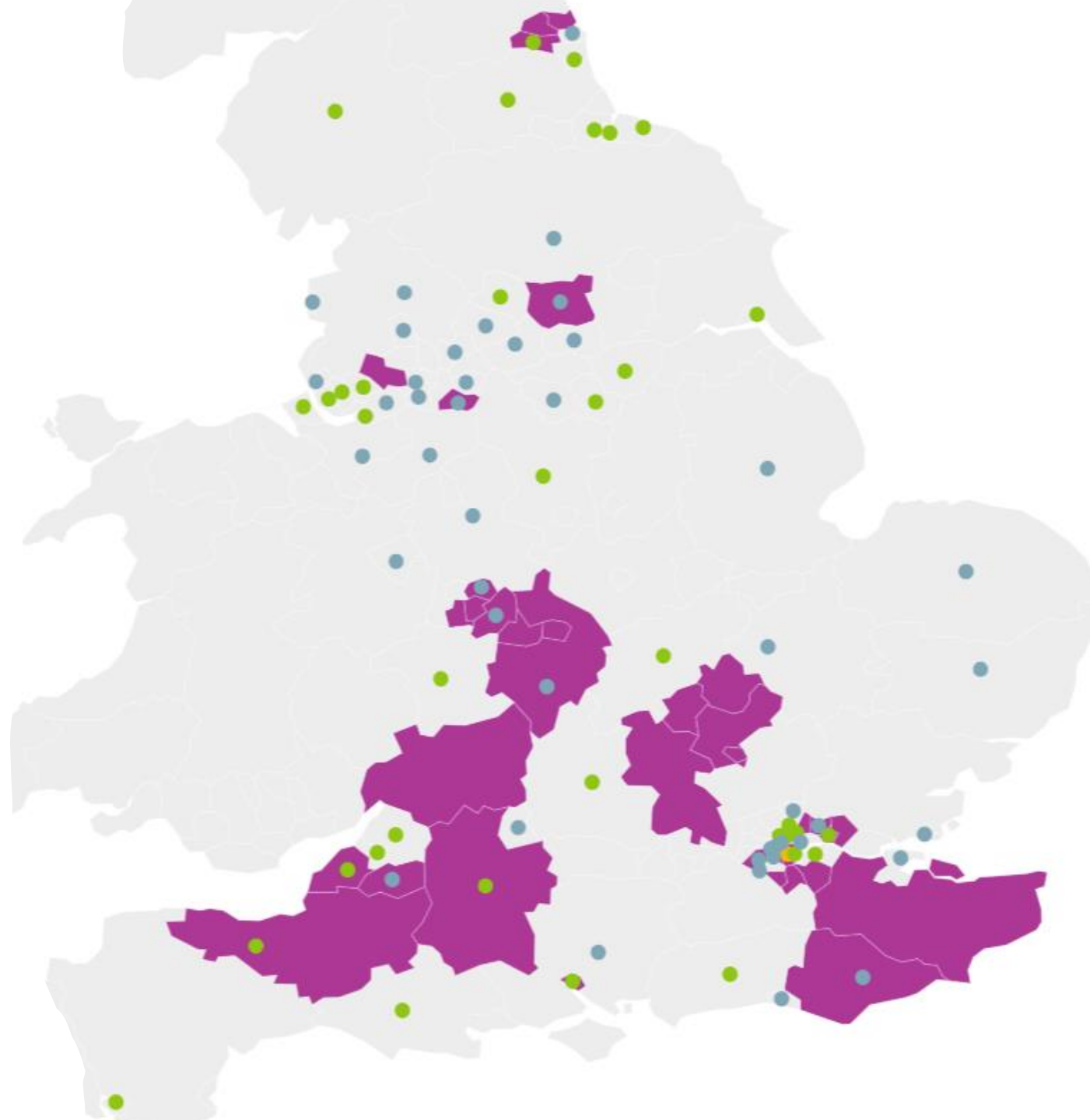


## **LIVED EXPERIENCES of removal and homelessness**

- Loss of motherhood
- Lack of support
- Lack of gender informed service provision
- Lack of trust
- Accommodation created barriers to reunification
- Motivation linked to their identity as a mother
- Desire and a hope to parent

## Service Gaps and barriers

- Age
- Time since removal
- Contraceptive choice
- Custody of remaining children
- Starts once proceedings have concluded
- Stops if mother becomes pregnant





A photograph of a row of red brick terraced houses. The houses have multiple windows with white frames and several chimneys on the roof. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text 'Homeless and social care system' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Homeless and social care system

- Under-occupancy
- Temporary accommodation
- Financial and logistical pressures





## **LIVED EXPERIENCE AS A FOUNDATION TO SERVICE DESIGN**

- Coproduction
- Creative service design
- Provide a platform
- What matters to them



# GROWTH PROJECT

# Growth Project

- Funded by BLCF for 18 months
- Designed by and for women
- A targeted gender-informed approach
- Informal and non-judgemental based around building a positive relationship
- First of its kind in the UK, providing a tenancy and specialist support focused on child removal.
- This strengths-based support is enabled by low caseloads (1:4) which facilitate person centred approaches







## LIVED EXPERIENCE AS A FOUNDATION TO SERVICE DESIGN

- Themes from co-production;
- **Advocacy**
- **Secure accommodation**
- **Support through care proceedings**
  - **Fair legal advice**
  - **Trauma informed approach**
- **Access to timely flexible therapy**





# Growth Project

## Accommodation

12 units of dispersed accommodation

Number of bedrooms required

Procured for the project and from within existing housing stock in safe areas.

## Support

Intensive case work - Navigator model

Peer Support

Legal Support

Toolkits

## Psychological Intervention

1-1 Sessions

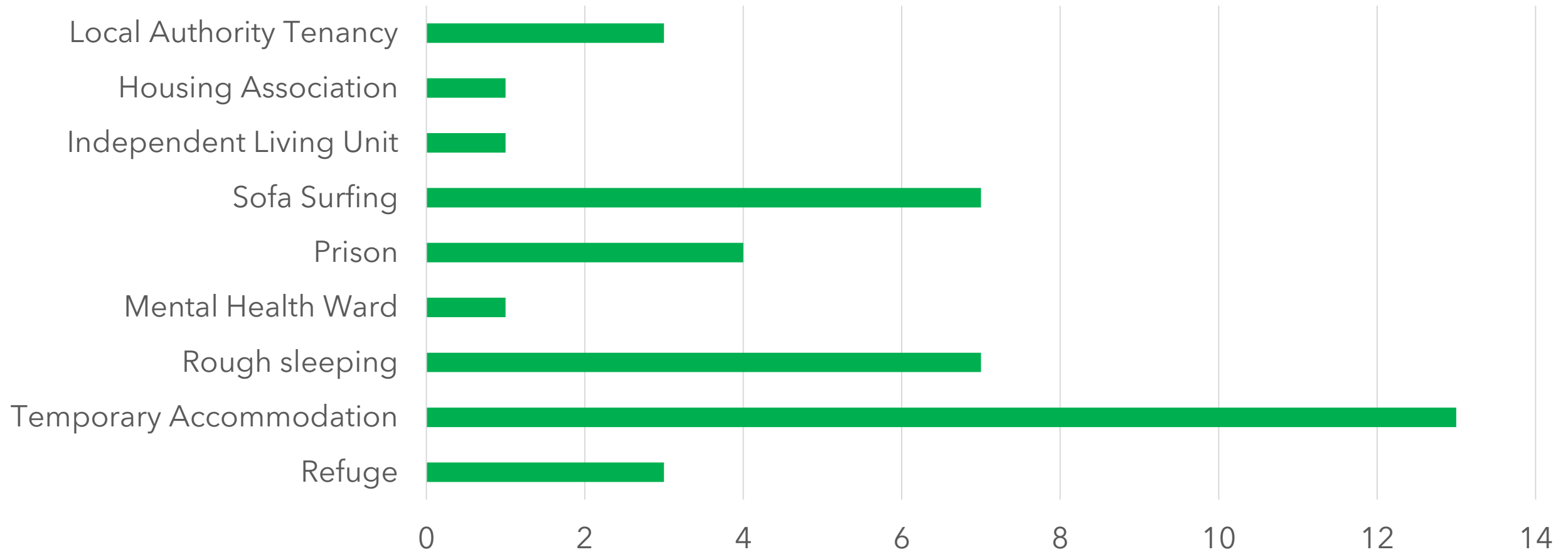
Group Sessions

Family Mediation

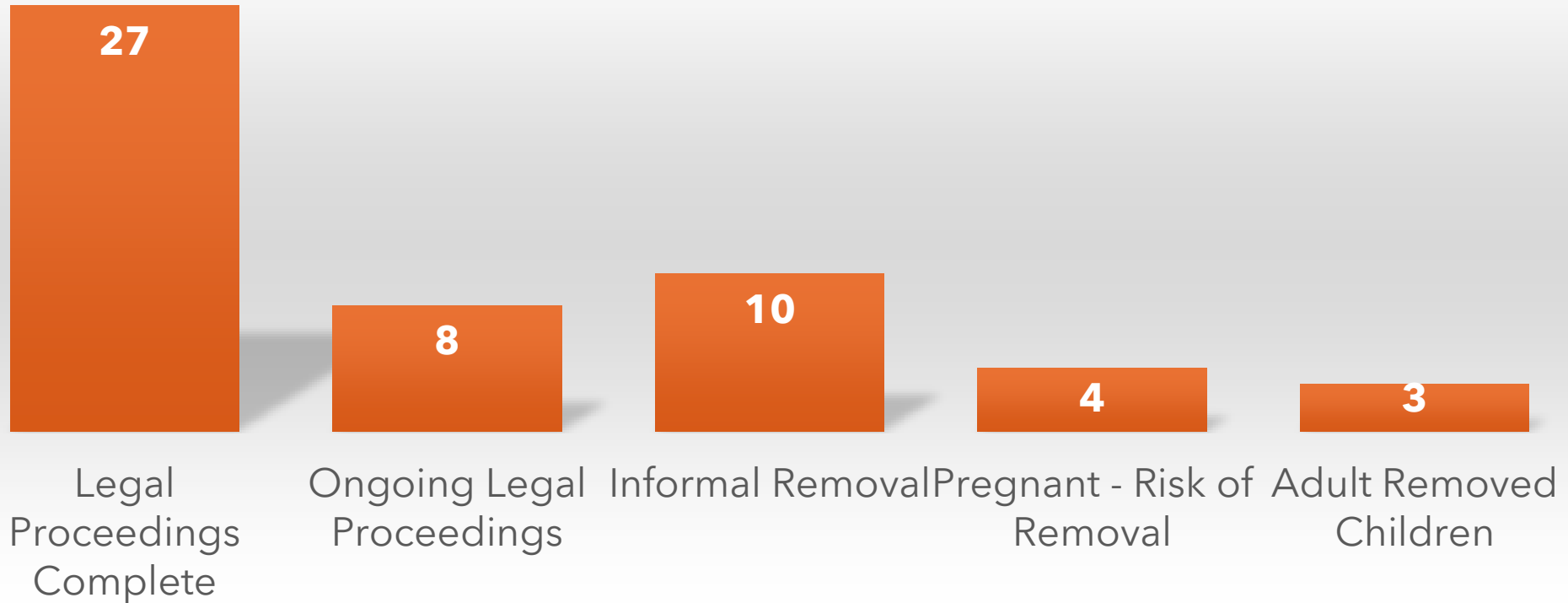
## Growth Project

**We received 50 referrals into service in the first three months**

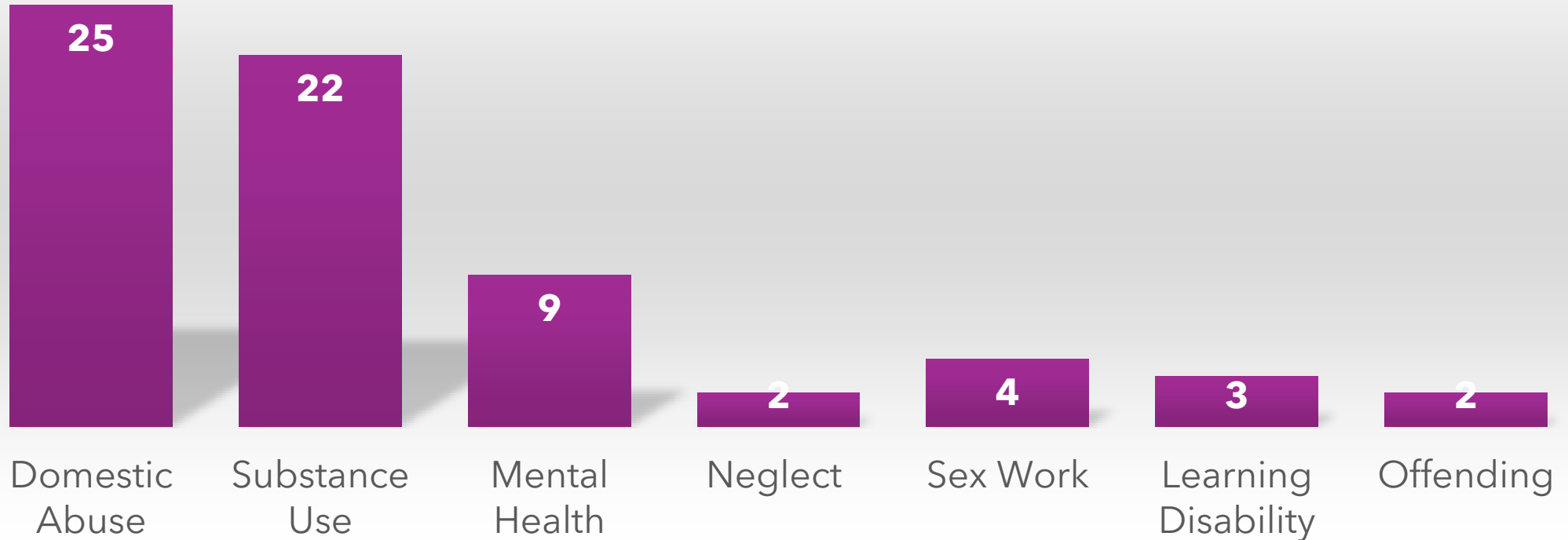
### Accommodation on Referral



### Status of Child Removal Upon Referral



### Factors Linked to Social Care Involvement



**More than just a house**

**All properties come fully furnished and ready to move into.**

- High quality homes.
- Privacy and space
- Tenancy sustainment



# More than just a home

- Low caseloads to offer more intensive/ focused support.
- Stable home
- Legal representation during proceedings
- Forensic psychologist to explore past and present trauma
- Toolkits (easy guide) to care proceedings, so mums feel informed and supported throughout the process





## Peer support monthly drop in Women can access a safe space



“I feel judged and hold a lot of shame after my children were removed, even by family and friends, and accessing a group with women who have the same experience feels safe.”

14 women in Sheffield have accessed our peer support activity.

4 women  
supported to  
attend family  
court

8 women  
supported to  
have contact  
with their  
children

# Women on service

We have supported and accommodated 13  
women  
with a combined total of 21 looked after  
children

4 women  
supported  
through  
pregnancy to  
access  
health care

9 women  
supported to  
access legal  
advice

9 women  
supported to  
attend meetings  
with social  
services