

CORONAVIRUS: IMPACT ON THE HOMELESS

JASMINE BASRAN

DEFIANCE #037
WITH PETER MCCORMACK



DEF037 - JASMINE BASRAN INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

CORONAVIRUS: IMPACT ON THE HOMELESS

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Peter McCormack 02:49:

Good morning Jasmine. How are you?

Jasmine Basran 02:51:

Good morning. I'm doing really well. Thank you.

Peter McCormack 02:54:

You're on a lockdown as well?

Jasmine Basran 02:57:

Yeah, as I'm following all government advice. Yeah, it's been about two weeks but I think I'm slowly adjusting to it.

Peter McCormack 03:06:

Well, thank you for coming on the show. This is an important topic for me. I've been a casual donator to Shelter since over a decade. But my sister-

Jasmine Basran 03:18:

Crisis.

Peter McCormack 03:18:

Well, no, no, no, I know you are Crisis.

Jasmine Basran 03:20:

Oh, sorry.

Peter McCormack 03:20:

I'm just saying in terms of homelessness, it's an important problem for me. But I'm also a donator to Crisis because my sister volunteers every Christmas at the Crisis centers specifically for women. Every Christmas rather than a Christmas present, I make a donation to Crisis.

Jasmine Basran 03:39:

That's brilliant.

Peter McCormack 03:40:

Yeah. I'm fully aware of the charity. My sister will be very excited that I'm doing this and yeah, I didn't get the charity wrong at the start.

Jasmine Basran 03:50:

It's only because that happens more than you'd think. Sorry for jumping in.

Peter McCormack 03:56:

No, it's fine. I actually, I support both charities and Tom who helped schedule this is also a big fan of Crisis as a charity. But just as a starting point, before we get into the detail, it would probably be good if you just let people know who Crisis are, what Crisis does and what your role is at their charity.

Jasmine Basran 04:13:

Yeah. Crisis is the national charity for people facing homelessness. We work across England, Scotland and Wales to support people directly out of homelessness. And we work side by side with kind of thousands of people every year to do that. We also, so we run services and we don't offer our own housing, but we work very closely with landlords to house people securely, to ensure people kind of are able to support themselves financially. So whether that's through the benefit system or through work. We also run kind of employment training and classes and also lots of kind of wider support such as kind of support with mental health and skills and general well-being.

Jasmine Basran 05:01:

We do creative arts and classes. We offer sports classes, so kind of a holistic package to support people. But our goal is very much to end homelessness

for people. We believe it can be ended, we know it can be ended and that's our aim through our services, but also in our campaigning work. We also have a big policy and campaigns kind of operation. And in 2018 we published a plan to end homelessness and we worked with governments to show them what we can do to end homelessness and the changes needed to support everyone into secure and stable housing, which we know is possible and which we want to achieve in kind of the next 10 years.

Peter McCormack 05:50:

Okay, great. And can you give me and the listeners a picture of what homelessness means in the UK? Because I think automatically when you think of somebody as being homeless, you tend to think maybe one of the people you see maybe with a sleeping bag sleeping in the some kind of cardboard construction of themselves. We almost think of the cliché version of homelessness, but homelessness is far broader than this. It covers a far wider group of situations than just your traditional clichéd view of a homeless person, right?

Jasmine Basran 06:22:

Yeah, absolutely. Exactly as you've said, there are thousands of people who unfortunately are in really dangerous and terrible situation. Obviously being on the streets or maybe sleeping in kind of sleeping bags, in tents and really insecure forms of accommodation. But homelessness is more than that. Sometimes we talk about something called hidden homelessness and it means the types of homelessness that people don't generally think of. Actually some of the largest groups of people who are homeless are people who are sofa surfing. So not having anywhere to go, having to stay with friends or with family if they can on their sofas.

Jasmine Basran 07:08:

And I think sometimes people don't imagine that difficult but it is when it's your permanent situation when you don't know where you'll be going to next, when you don't know how long you can stay. And also when you're trying to kind of respect the privacy and space of the person you're staying with, but don't have your own kind of privacy and space. Homelessness is also that situation. It's also living in hostels, living in kind of temporary accommodations, hotels and bed and breakfast. Which again, I think sometimes can sound quite nice. And I think, if you think about living in a hotel, obviously when we all go on holiday it is a nice experience.

Jasmine Basran 07:49:

But then if you think about living there permanently and lots of places, lots of hotels and bed and breakfast don't have things like basic facilities to cook, the facilities to wash your clothes, to clean. And it's a really difficult situation to be

in, especially for families if you've got children and trying to kind of support them in that space. And children not having their own kind of space to be able to do their homework or to be able to kind of grow up and develop as we'd hope they can in a home, in a safe environment.

Jasmine Basran 08:20:

Homelessness is kind of many, many different things and people experience many different kind of things in that, but it is a wide range and it's something that we want to see and deal together so that the ultimate goal is everyone can be in their own home, in a secure kind of long-term place for them to kind of settle down and grow and thrive as lots of us are able to.

Peter McCormack 08:45:

What are the range of reasons that people end up in a homeless situation? Obviously there's economic reasons and maybe victims of various forms of abuse. Are there any other obvious reasons that people might not be aware of which lead to people being in a homelessness situation?

Jasmine Basran 09:01:

One of the things that we've seen particularly increase over the last few years is people becoming homeless because they are evicted from a private rented tenancy and kind of people struggling to be able to afford a home. I think it's really important, as you've said, there are lots of different reasons and often people have suffered a traumatic experience or abuse, but also it's really difficult because sometimes people are homeless because they can't, they're struggling to cover the cost of their own because they may not be able to work or they may not be able to work many hours. And the support they're receiving from the government, from the welfare system isn't enough that they can and keep their rent and kind of keep covering the cost of their rent and all kind of disability illness. They might not be able to work or they're working in very low paid jobs or zero hour contracts. And it can be really, really difficult.

Jasmine Basran 10:06:

One of those we've seen more and more kind of people struggling economically, struggling financially and that's driving homelessness. But we also see people becoming homeless from specific situations. We know people who have been in care are much more likely, are much higher risk of homelessness, or people who are discharged from hospital because without kind of safe support networks around you or often in those situations, people don't have anywhere else to go. And they leave care or they leave a hospital or they leave somewhere like prison and there isn't anywhere else for them to go. And at the moment there isn't join up or services and support in place to make sure that those people go somewhere where they have a roof over their

heads and somewhere safe for them. And too often that leads to people ending up on the street.

Jasmine Basran 10:58:

Really a huge thing we are asking is there's just not enough affordable homes for people to live in. And that would make kind of the huge difference with homelessness. Because no matter what your experiences are, they should be the kind of safety and support given so that no one does end up homeless. It shouldn't be a situation that if an event does happen in your life, if you do experience a traumatic experience or go through a relationship breakdown that that means you are then in a situation where you are homeless.

Peter McCormack 11:35:

Okay. Is it a growing problem homelessness statistically? Can you give me a picture over the last maybe year, five year, 10 years? Is it a growing problem or is it a problem that's been solved?

Jasmine Basran 11:47:

In England in particular, we have seen kind of significant increases in homelessness. The official statistics from the government in England showed that there was a kind of 169% increase in people sleeping rough. And so the kind of very worse, the sharpest end of homelessness over the last kind of 10 years. We know that that's been a really significant problem. We've also, Crisis has done their own kind of research, looking at all the different forms of homelessness. And we have seen increases in nearly all forms of homelessness. Especially for people who are sofa surfing or in that kind of more hidden homelessness situation, we've seen huge increases over the last kind of five years.

Jasmine Basran 12:32:

In Scotland and Wales, it's been a little bit different. In Scotland, the situation is stabilised, there hasn't been the increases we have seen in England, but we have still seen some forms of homelessness increase. Particularly around people living in things like bed and breakfast and hotels. And a lot of that is down to kind of the different government legal systems we have in the three countries. But we know that if we don't see significant changes in policies, in laws, that homelessness will increase. And over the next kind of two decades we will see kind of the doubling of the numbers of people who are homeless and if we don't see kind of huge changes come into place.

Jasmine Basran 13:20:

Some of that actually is now changing where in a period of kind of things really up in the air and lots of uncertainty that we're all experiencing, but we are seeing in response to COVID-19 the government is putting or has put in some

protections in place and made some changes that we know if they are carried on in the long-term would really, really help prevent future homelessness and change that trend of increasing homelessness.

Peter McCormack 13:48:

Why is it becoming an increasing problem? Is it all economic? Is it inequality? Is it a lack of funding due to austerity? Is it all of this? What are the reasons there's a growing problem?

Jasmine Basran 14:02:

One of the main things we see as kind of driving this growing problem is the lack of affordable housing. One thing we've really, really seen over, really significantly over the last kind of few years, well actually it kind of backtracks to over the last 40 years to be really honest. And we have seen a huge decline in things like the availability of social rent housing. So housing at social rent levels of people on lower incomes. And we've seen that really, really fall away over the last kind of 40 years or so.

Jasmine Basran 14:41:

And then, especially within the last 10 years, we also saw a really big erosion of support from the welfare system, so changes to housing benefit and much much less of support in that area, and then less support for people to live on with their day to day. And that's had a huge impact on people because it does mean it's really hard to do things like be able to pay your rent and be able to cover the costs of essential. So buy your food that you need, cover bills, cover anything unexpected. If suddenly your boiler breaks down, you need to have something to be able to cover that. And we often see those kinds of things just can completely destabilise people when they're living in a situation of kind of really living hand to mouth, and having to kind of get by and struggle week to week.

Jasmine Basran 15:33:

Those are the main things that we've really seen and particularly aware with housing, it's really difficult for counselors for example, to be able to then also support people who are homeless into safe and secure housing. It's been more harder and harder to kind of find housing for people that they can access and then kind of be able to live in for the long-term.

Peter McCormack 16:02:

Okay. Just before we start talking about the impact that coronavirus has had, because obviously this is unprecedented times. For two reasons, firstly, I guess you guys are under double pressure. You've got increased demand on your resources at a time when I guess that there is an increase in pressure on your own economic position because charities are suffering during this like

any business are suffering. I do want to cover that. But before we get into that, just the last thing I want to ask is what is the impact on the individual in becoming homeless? What are the additional risks of sinking into drug and alcohol abuse, maybe sex work and mental health problems, the effect on children? Can you just ... I know that's a very broad question. It might take quite some time to answer, but just I think it'd be useful to understand the impact on the individual.

Jasmine Basran 16:56:

Yeah. I think, if you think about kind of living your day to day, and I once went to a talk and someone asked this and I think it's done really well. If you think about what you do day to day, maybe not on new day to day, but all day to day. And you think about, you get up in the morning, you go to work, you maybe meet friends or spend time with family. And if you think about doing all of those things or trying to do all of these things without somewhere to come back to and to call a home, you might completely not have somewhere, you might be kind of without shelter whatsoever or you're in extremely difficult situation like a tent. Or maybe you're living in a room in a hostel and there's lots of other people who are kind of dealing with their own challenges.

Jasmine Basran 17:46:

And you can immediately, you can already start imagining how difficult that is. And homelessness is just a completely destabilising situation. It's really difficult to kind of find your own space, find your own kind of stability. But also it's incredibly isolating. It's lonely and it's really, really scary not knowing where you might be able to sleep next or not knowing what your situation will be like if you come back into a night shelter or a hostel for example and you're sharing your space with lots of other people. It's incredibly difficult and it does make it very hard for things like kind of keeping mental health.

Jasmine Basran 18:29:

We know that homelessness itself can create additional problems and things like mental health needs. We know people who are homeless for a very long time or experience homelessness more than once in their life are much more likely to have to develop things like mental health and support needs. The experience is just awful. And especially if we're talking about the very sharpest end of homelessness. People who sleep on our streets are also kind of significantly more likely to be victims of crimes, of abuse. And that situation is just shocking that that should happen.

Jasmine Basran 19:10:

Someone who's already kind of in a situation where they're incredibly exposed, sleeping on the streets, very unsafe, very dangerous, but then also kind of more subtle to kind of experiencing violence and kind of some really

awful experiences such as sexual assault. The experience itself is just, it's really kind of debilitating and has a huge impact on people's lives. And that's one of the reasons why we're striving to just end it altogether and prevent it in as many cases as possible because we don't want people having to be forced into those situations and go through those experiences. We want to make sure that everyone is supported and isn't in those kinds of situations, which I'm sure none of us would ever want anyone to be in, and certainly no one we know to ever be in.

Peter McCormack 20:04:

Actually I do have another couple of questions before we get into the other thing. Do people become institutionalised in their own homelessness and that it becomes a life they don't want to escape? Or in every scenario, does somebody want to escape the situation they're in?

Jasmine Basran 20:22:

I think that's a really interesting question. And from our work, working directly with people, we do see people who may have been, who are in homelessness for many years and in kind of, especially people who may be sleeping rough and on our streets for kind of many years. And I also volunteer at our Crisis's Christmas centers. And I've worked with some people who have been homeless for kind of 40 years or 20 years and it's really, really difficult. And I think sometimes in that situation if you talk to someone, they might say to you, "No, I'm happy being here. I'm okay."

Jasmine Basran 21:03:

But I think you have to remember that for someone to have been sleeping rough for that length of time, they have been let down by services and they've been let down by support and they most likely, and we see this lots, have developed a mistrust of authorities. If you are in that situation where you are having to sleep rough, you're forced to sleep on the streets, things haven't been there for you when you've needed them to be there. And there's lots and lots of reasons why we see that happening. We see kind of, there's legal barriers that stop people from getting help. If someone is sleeping rough or homeless and doesn't have a connection to a local area, they can be turned away from support.

Jasmine Basran 21:45:

People can be turned away because of their immigration status. We can see people coming here from kind of European countries working, but then often having very little employment protection and rights and then losing their job, having no access to the benefits system, so nothing to kind of help them to get to keep a roof over their heads and then they end up homeless. And there's very little there unfortunately in the systems that we have now that

support them. We do see people who have been let down time and time again. And so their response is to push people away.

Jasmine Basran 22:18:

And our answer to that is always to keep trying with those people. And that's not to force them into a situation but over time to keep trying with people because homelessness is incredibly dangerous. The life expectancy of people experiencing homelessness, the average life expectancy is 43 years and that's down from 47 years four years ago. It's has a huge, huge impact on people health wise, mental health wise. And so even if you are in a situation where someone is saying to you, "No, I'm happy here." I think we can all agree that, that none of us would choose to be in that situation.

Jasmine Basran 22:57:

And actually if someone's in a place where they think they're better off there, it's because the other alternatives that they've been offered or that they've experienced have been really not, just nowhere near good enough and have really let them down too. It's about getting the right support to people in the right way to make sure that they can live safely and in their own way.

Peter McCormack 23:21:

Yeah. Again, sorry it keeps leading to other questions. It's making me think, what is a success story for you? Where do you consider a success story and where have you got somebody to? And what are the challenges of taking somebody from living say on the street to being completely independent? What are the challenges you face with that individual? And also within that sort of third question is, what are the risks in that as well? Is there a risk that somebody cannot function in a ... Because I guess what you're trying to get them to a point is where they function in society where they may be then have a job, have a home and be self sufficient. Are there risks that people don't actually want to function in that form of society and then slip back into living back on the street. Again, another broad question.

Jasmine Basran 24:13:

So what's success for me, I can tell you the story that really stuck with me from, again, from our Crisis at Christmas centers. Well, actually I can tell you two stories because I think it'll probably give a range of experience. And because as the point you made earlier, sometimes it's easy to think homelessness as one type of story and actually there are many, many stories and many people in different situations. But one of the things that really stuck with me was, a lady came to our Crisis at Christmas center who'd been sleeping rough for a really, really long time. I'm tempted to say 20 years, but I'm going to be completely honest and say I think I've made up that number. But she had definitely been sleeping for many years on the streets and kind of really

struggling in lots of different ways and her physical health was really deteriorating.

Jasmine Basran 25:10:

And she had been referred to one of our centers and had come along and her media kind of reaction to that was extreme hostility. She was extremely hostile when she came into the center. And I think she was very, very hostile to the people at the door. We often have people in our centers kind of welcoming people before they even enter and she kind of disclaimed she was obviously not happy, so displayed kind of hostility and upset. And the person at the door did what we do at our centers and welcomed her inside and introduced her to the services. And she later said that was the first time that in many years that she had not had a negative response to her.

Jasmine Basran 26:00:

So when she'd been scared and acting in a certain way. Often people would react and kind of to push her away. And that was the first time that that hadn't happened. And during that time, of course it's at Christmas, she engaged in the services and she used kind of the different classes that were on offer, the advice and a year later she was in a flat and kind of renting on her own and kind of living in her flat and looking at her different options. And that kind of shows the journey people can go on. But I think as well it's really important that we don't just think about the person, but the right support in place. She was able to find what she needed and what was on offer at Crisis at that time was what she needed and what would help her. And I think that's the really important thing that where people are able to connect in with services and with people who can support them, there's hope.

Jasmine Basran 27:02:

There's another story I'll tell you about. A guy who came to Crisis in Newcastle, very young, he'd been sofa surfing and was really, really worried about having to sleep on the streets because the friend's house he was staying in said that they could no longer have him there and he was terrified. And he was referred to us because we had a project running with the job center in Newcastle. When he went to the job center, they said, "Oh, maybe Crisis can help you." And he was struggling with mental health. But he came to us and we were able to find him a secure kind of place to stay. And then from there we were able to support him. He engaged with us and we helped him with mental health service, access mental health services. And from there he then went on to kind of go into our renting ready course and learn about renting his own place.

Jasmine Basran 27:59:

But also he started thinking about what he wanted to do and he decided he

wanted to do some volunteering and work in certain industries and we supported him with that. And then since then he realised he didn't want to do the work he engaged in and he wants to go back to university and study. And that's the case of kind of preventing someone who was homeless from going into kind of an even worse situation and being able to support them at the right time.

Jasmine Basran 28:24:

And I think one point you said was kind of the journey should be that someone then kind of is self sufficient and works. And I think it's really important that for me the journey is very much helping the person on their way into housing, secure house has to be the base of. The journey is always very much supporting someone into a place where they can live securely and without worry of losing that home. But then beyond that, yes, many, many people would like to work and we run services to support those ambitions and to help people with the skills they need. So with language classes or confidence building or lots of different types of skills to kind of help them realise what they'd like to do.

Jasmine Basran 29:13:

But it's also, I think it's really important that there isn't this kind of assumption that you have to work to be of value, for example, or you have to work to live successfully. Some people that we support have disabilities, have illnesses or have other things that make it very difficult to work, but that doesn't mean work in a traditional sense, for example. But that doesn't mean they don't want to be supported to be able to do other things or volunteer or kind of be involved and stabilise and then have kind of lived their lives in a way that they're happy with. I think that's really important. And really what we tried to do and what many, many homelessness services tried to do as well is support people into what they would like to do. And some times, many times that is work that, and for some people that work might not be the most appropriate outcome. And it might be something less, more like volunteering or something like that.

Peter McCormack 30:17:

People have a more conservative persuasion politically will probably not look too lightly on the idea of social housing and social support that you most likely have run into people who kind of think, well, I don't want to be taxed to pay for other people's problems. Are there any sound economic arguments outside of policy for why it's good for society to actually help homeless people and take homeless people off the street?

Jasmine Basran 30:47:

Well, if we look at kind of the experiences of homelessness that we were

talking about before, if you are experiencing homelessness, you're much more likely to need support with health, for example, or access services. We know that overall reducing and ending homelessness saves much more money than it costs. One thing we did when we wrote our plan to end homelessness in 2018 was we looked at the economic argument behind that, so the cost of people being forced into homelessness.

Jasmine Basran 31:25:

Also we have to remember that people living in situations like bed and breakfast hotels is actually very expensive. The local authorities are spending lots of money supporting people in those situations because they can't access things in many places like social housing where someone can be housed for a long period of time and that is expensive. And when we looked at kind of all the costings around that and all the costings around of people not having to use or access certain services as frequently such as mental health services, alcohol and drug services, we found that there's significant cost savings to be made. Over a 10 year period taking away the costs of kind of all the interventions needed, you would kind of generate 9.9 billion in economic gain, so in financial benefits.

Jasmine Basran 32:20:

And that is because, it makes sense if you think about it, if you're making sure that people are supported and are able to kind of live safely and securely, it does then also mean you save any costs of people being in a dangerous situation or in a situation where they need more help. And I think it's really interesting what you said about social housing because I think we have seen a shift in attitudes towards social housing from all kind of political parties. And more and more I think all political parties are understanding the role that it plays in our society and the need for it. And we're hoping that kind of in the future we see significant increases in social housing. And that's certainly something Crisis and lots of the homelessness actors who, Shelter and others that we work closely with are pushing.

Peter McCormack 33:15:

Okay. All right. We're obviously in unprecedented times for everybody right now. Where this first struck me was, I can't remember the exact date, but on the day where it was rumored almost certain that they were going to announce the lockdown for the following day, the first thing that struck my mind was, well, how do you have a lockdown with homeless people and what support is being provided for homeless people? I got in my car and drove down to London and when I spoke to two or three people, I didn't take public transport and went to Regent Street and spoke to two or three people. And two things stood out to me.

Peter McCormack 33:59:

The first thing was that there was still a lot of homeless people on the street despite what was happening. But the second thing that stood out to me talking to people is that their ability to find out or access information was obviously restricted. They're not at home with a computer or a TV. I did see one guy with a phone, but the two guys I spoke to didn't even have a phone. The only way they had access to information was talking to other people and nobody was aware that lockdown was coming.

Peter McCormack 34:25:

They had just made the announcement that there would be hotel accommodation provided. Again, nobody knew that this was available. It would be useful to me if you could talk me through the journey Crisis has been through with coronavirus. When you started to become aware it was a problem that you were going to have to address, and then what are the particular challenges you are now facing with this?

Jasmine Basran 34:49:

Yeah, I think probably how everyone felt was things moved really, really quickly. Once we didn't, as everyone became aware that actually this is going to be a big problem for us, I think then our priority as a charity for people facing homelessness was, what do we do to make sure that the people we're supporting and people we can support are safe and are protected. And as you said, although there are many, many forms of homelessness, particularly in this situation, the people most exposed are those people in the worst form, the people who are sleeping on the streets or who are in night shelters, where they can't follow government advice to self isolate or kind of social distancing or any of those kinds of things.

Jasmine Basran 35:38:

For us it was about, okay, we need to make sure that our services also at the same time kind of to protect our frontline staff. We need to make sure our services are adapting to support people that need it as quickly as possible. That's something that we're still doing, but we quite immediately had to change the way some of our services are working. Obviously for people who are in accommodation where they can isolate, we can support them remotely, which is something we're doing. But we're also having to support people much more directly where they are more exposed and at risk.

Jasmine Basran 36:15:

We also know generally that people experiencing homelessness are kind of three times more likely to have a chronic health condition, including respiratory conditions. They're particularly at risk during this time with the pandemic. Our aim has really been to try to move as quickly as possible, but

also doing that through working very closely with local homelessness organisations as well as through our services with partners but also with government. Because I think the biggest shift we saw, so what you said, as people ... When the lockdown was first being talked about no one really knew what was going on and no one was really sure what it meant, if it meant kind of a total lockdown, if it meant some form of it.

Jasmine Basran 37:00:

But the biggest thing we then saw come from the government directly around homelessness was the initiative to then direct local authorities to say that everyone who is sleeping on the streets, everyone in night shelters and everyone in hostels where there's kind of shared accommodation, shared facilities, so they can't self isolate and can't follow health guidelines needs to be in self-contained temporary accommodation. That's been the hugest kind of shift.

Peter McCormack 37:26:

Has that been achieved?

Jasmine Basran 37:29:

We've seen around, unofficial figures suggest that, not ours sorry, but the unofficial figures from the government suggests they've been around 4,000 people who have been moved into self contained temporary accommodation. But we know that they're still around a thousand people who have an access to that and who need that support. But it has been a significant effort and lots and lots of homelessness charities have been involved in supporting that and supporting those people.

Jasmine Basran 37:56:

We supported kind of people through our service in Merseyside to do that with a partner, a hotel partner, space city part hotels that we were able to support people directly into hotels, hotel accommodation and out of that dangerous situation. That's been a really, really huge shift and something really unprecedented, an extraordinary effort that we haven't seen before. And what we want to see now and what we want to know is kind of make sure all those people who are still left outside of that support are receiving it. Because we do know that there are people being turned away from that support for reasons that they shouldn't be.

Jasmine Basran 38:38:

There needs to be an assertive approach from government to make sure that everyone has access to that, because really having people fall through the gaps in this situation is incredibly dangerous and is a life or death situation even more so than kind of the dangers of homelessness in and of itself. We

need the government to be assertive and make sure that all local authorities are giving that support to people. We know some people are being turned away because of their immigration status, for example, which absolutely shouldn't happen.

Jasmine Basran 39:11:

We know some people have been turned away because of those legal reasons I mentioned. Because they don't have a local connection to the area, which again, absolutely shouldn't be happening. But then as well, we want to make sure that once people are in those hotels or bed and breakfast or whatever form that self contained accommodation is, we need to make sure that they're getting the right support when they're in that situation. We need to make sure there's dedicated funding for local authorities so that they can provide the support services people need.

Jasmine Basran 39:47:

If you're putting lots of people into a hotel, how are you staffing it? How are you making sure people are getting food? How are they able to access things like mental health support services or drug and alcohol support services if that's what's needed? Is incredibly important that all of those things are happening and people are getting the right support they need. We have seen an unprecedented shift and unprecedented action over this, but we need to make sure it's done properly with the right funding in place and with the right support to people, because it gives a huge opportunity to make sure that no one is left extremely exposed just because they are homeless or just because of their immigration status, which is a situation that we just shouldn't be in.

Peter McCormack 40:31:

Right. I've got a couple of questions. One might come across as ignorant, I hope it isn't. But if the supply is coming say from a hotel, and this facility is being provided for a number of homeless people, there's a few questions that come to mind. My first one comes to mind is that, are there enforcement rules where everybody has to stay in their room and perhaps can go out once a day for exercise as similar to everyone else. Therefore, this is going to be quite a different experience for someone who's used to living on the street perhaps roaming wherever they choose, to now being self contained within a room. It's quite a different experience. How are they being fed?

Peter McCormack 41:10:

But also, and this is a bit that might sound ignorant, but is there a risk of suddenly putting, filling a hotel with homeless people who maybe have a range of different mental health addiction issues? I know for example talking to my sister, there are certain situations that can flare up Crisis at Christmas

that they have to be aware of and have to have certain staff on hand for that. How is all this being managed?

Jasmine Basran 41:40:

Well, those are actually the very kind of things that we're worried about and we're trying to work with the government and push the government on to to make sure that those kind of issues, as you said, are being managed. You're completely right in that it's an extremely different situation. Not everyone who has been housed has come directly from sleeping on the street, but many people have. And it's a huge shift and it is going to be difficult and I think lots of us are struggling with this anyway. But particularly when there's been such a huge shift and that's why we're kind of really pushing that they get the right support in that situation because there's also a really big opportunity here to get people support and connect with them.

Jasmine Basran 42:25:

I know we've worked with some people that have kind of been very hard to engage with or haven't accepted support for the reasons we were talking about earlier. So kind of having very difficult journeys and having very difficult experiences. But they are in accommodation now through this initiative and that's really, really important because that is a starting point. It's not an easy journey and I think we can't kind of take away how difficult this is going to be for some people. Some people have been through incredibly difficult things and have rightly kind of mistrust many kind of things that are happening.

Jasmine Basran 43:06:

But the main thing is they are in a safe place and we need to make sure that they're being supported properly and therefore not kind of just left in a hotel room as you said. And that's one of the reasons why we really want to see dedicated funding from government on this to maintain that support, to make sure it is there. We know in lots of areas it's just very varied. We know in some places you already had existing arrangements with support services or organisations that were providing support to people and they've been able to link in to this initiative. So they are there and they are helping people through this.

Jasmine Basran 43:47:

But in other places that wasn't in place and it isn't in place. And so it's leaving people in really, really difficult situations. And if you have staff that also don't know how to manage these situations, it's going to be incredibly difficult for them. It's just really important we get all of that now as quickly as possible in the right way, kind of funded and straight to people so that they can engage in that and get what they need while in this situation which-

Peter McCormack 44:18:

Are you saying though that that's not all in place right now, that there are hotels now which are accommodating people but aren't structurally set up in the way you would like them to be?

Jasmine Basran 44:27:

Yeah, there were places where we know that we need to link in more support services and that's something that many kind of homelessness charities are trying to work with to make sure that that is in place.

Peter McCormack 44:41:

Is that actually, are there actually problems now or are there situations flaring up? It's one of the things that I can't get out of my mind with this, is what I keep thinking now. What are the risks here? Because one of the things I was thinking is that this idea that you must get homeless people off the street, but is this a potential, is the risk the other way? Is there a potential that these like prisons become a hotbed for the spread of the virus if it gets into one of these hotels as well?

Jasmine Basran 45:10:

Yeah, I think that's something that's really, really important. And then it's something that we also are pushing the government for that people in this accommodation, they also get the access to health care that they need to, particularly people who are symptomatic of coronavirus are getting that support straight away. They are set up to be able to self isolate, but then you need to make sure that they have access to food and can self isolate appropriately.

Jasmine Basran 45:44:

And I think one of the things we're also really pushing the government is for the staff and helping people in those situations themselves to also have kind of the necessary protective equipment, so that they can also support people who are symptomatic. It is also, it's a difficult time to manage through and there's kind of lots of different causes.

Peter McCormack 46:12:

The new staff are going to be down the pecking order right now if we don't have frontline medical staff who have PPE, and we certainly don't have people in the community being let's say with homeless for the elderly, or my cousin who works supporting people with mental health issues, she works in a home for that. I mean she's got no access to PPE. I assume these facilities are going to be similarly down the pecking order and therefore the staff working there are going to be at an increased risk. We've seen it with 15 deaths so far of transport workers.

Peter McCormack 46:45:

Naturally it feels like we're putting people in a riskier situation. And I guess, is this being talked about enough? I've not heard this area referred to. So with regards to homelessness, I originally heard that the hotels should be used to provide accommodation. And I also heard that local authorities were ordered to do this, but I haven't heard anything else. Is a big enough light being shone at this? Is it being talked about enough? And are we potentially heading to some kind of, I don't want to use the word scandal, but just situations flaring up because this isn't being dealt with or given the priority it may be needs.

Jasmine Basran 47:24:

I think the really important thing here is also that we can't be complacent about this as you said, so we can't, being able to offer people a place so that they're not sleeping on the streets and they're not in that dangerous situation is absolutely necessary and definitely something that needed to happen and in response to coronavirus. But we can't now be complacent and say, "Okay, people are inside. That's it. They are less risk."

Jasmine Basran 47:50:

We know that there's lots more to be done to make sure that these people are then supported while they are inside as well. Looking ahead, we want to make sure that this then doesn't mean that people after kind of this initial portion, this initial response to coronavirus, that people aren't then returning to the streets and they aren't going back into night shelters or kind of sleeping in very insecure and dangerous accommodation.

Jasmine Basran 48:19:

There is a lot to be done to make sure that people are getting the right support. But then the government also needs to put in place kind of proactive plans for these people to be able to move out of these situations and into secure housing. And that's going to be the safest way to do this. We can't sustain the situation where people are kind of in hotels. We do need to make sure that people are going into secure long-term kind of safe places with a roof over their heads.

Jasmine Basran 48:49:

And I think that's one of the reasons we are pushing for kind of the dedicated funding behind this, is to make sure that that support is being put in place everywhere. We know lots of local authorities are doing really brilliant things. We've seen kind of a huge effort in lots of places and people are receiving that support. But we know that it can vary and it's not everywhere. And so you will need the funding behind it and we need the structures in place to make sure that it is happening in the way it needs to everywhere.

Peter McCormack 49:20:

Yeah. I worry about these hotel rooms starting to feel almost like prison cells for people who've, like I say, whilst people may, and I'm only referring to those who are living on the street, but whilst living on the street is obviously terrible and dangerous, there is at least you have the ability and the freedom to roam and move about to suddenly move into a situation where you're in a room probably no bigger than the room I'm in right now with a bed and a TV and being told you have to stay there apart from going out for a small amount of exercise. That must be a shock to the system.

Peter McCormack 49:52:

And the other thing that is coming to mind is this ethical position where in a post coronavirus world where we move beyond certain levels of social distancing. We have the point where the people will be essentially ejected onto the street. Obviously you're going to try and avoid this. But I think we obviously potentially face that.

Jasmine Basran 50:14:

I think that's something that we really have to prevent. I cannot let it happen. It just cannot be a case where people have been kind of supported off the street and you're completely right, obviously it's a kind of unprecedented situation we're in and we've never seen anything like this. We've never seen this action happen. It's something that kind of everyone's having to work on and figure out a little bit. But then the outcome of this cannot be people returning into rough sleeping and into night shelters and into those kind of really unsafe forms, ways of living that they were forced into before.

Jasmine Basran 50:53:

That's really incredibly important and will be a huge focus I think over the next few weeks to make sure that that just doesn't happen. I don't think there will be any excuse if that's the situation that happens because we now have people and we know who they are now. The government knows who they are because they are supporting them, they're having them in this situation and through this initiative, which has really shifted things. And so we need a huge effort from national government, from local government and organisations up and down the country to make sure that people aren't turned into homelessness.

Peter McCormack 51:33:

How stretched are you individually and as an organisation, as a charity, how stretched are you?

Jasmine Basran 51:40:

So we all kind of changing our services to make sure that we're supporting

people. But one thing we are doing as well is working very closely with local homelessness organisation. We've launched In This Together campaign. And that's calling out for support from the public so we can continue our services, but also crucially so we can offer grants to smaller organisations so that they are able to support people. We do run kind of in our normal life, we have 11 services across Great Britain. But we can't be everywhere. Lots and lots of small organisations do incredibly important work with community supporting people who are homeless and are really financially struggling.

Jasmine Basran 52:31:

Our grants program has been set up and released to be able to offer support to people so they can offer services to people and kind of tailor support to help them during this pandemic. And so that's something that we're kind of really pushing for. And we've seen lots of organisations take up that support, which has been really brilliant and we want to continue being able to give that support to people. That's something that we're really kind of keen to do and really pushing.

Peter McCormack 53:05:

Yeah. This situation has put a lot of economic pressure on a lot of people and I don't think we will see the full impact of that perhaps for weeks maybe months. But we do run the risk of many people in as we come out of this situation, being out of work, unable to pay their rent, unable to pay their mortgage. And I guess there is a potential here, you will face a deepening crisis of people without homes. Is this something you're planning for? How big a fear is this?

Jasmine Basran 53:34:

I think we've seen the government announce protections in response to the pandemic and there's lots of those that if, as you say, we're not sure how things will happen in the future, we're not sure what jobs people will be able to go back to, what they might not be able to go back to. What we need to do is make sure in this time that the support is there for everyone who needs it and it is enough support that they aren't in a place where they're struggling to kind of a roof over their heads. That's the last thing we want to see.

Jasmine Basran 54:09:

We're pushing very hard for kind of, we want to make sure universal credit is supporting people in the right way with enough, we have seen that increase in housing benefit, which will help lots of people. But we need to make sure that people are getting their money as soon as they can, if they do need support from universal credit and that things like deductions or overpayments or any kind of reduction in the support you would get from the benefits system is suspended altogether.

Jasmine Basran 54:40:

And we're likely going to need to see a continuation of that, while we understand what people can and can't access. And I think it's really important that we make sure that people aren't kind of just in a situation where they see a sudden drop and where things change. What we have seen is a suspension of evictions of the next three months, which is really, really important. But we need to make sure then that people aren't then after those three months left in a situation where they are facing eviction or they're worried about eviction just because those measures have run out.

Jasmine Basran 55:17:

I think the next few weeks will be really critical to understand the situations people are in. Things are moving so fast. But yeah, the most important thing would be to make sure that no one is kind of left on a cliff edge at the end of this and that the support in place isn't just a short term support but something that kind of is there as long as people need it.

Peter McCormack 55:42:

Personally I would have a worry for the kind of work you're doing is that we have seen the conservative government implement some quite strong austerity measures, and that with the levels of borrowing they have to do to support the economy right now there's a risk that we will see deepening levels of austerity in our post coronavirus world is something I would worry about. But anyway, listen, this has been very, very useful Jasmine. Thank you for being very open and honest. Is there anything I haven't asked you that you wish I had have asked you, any part of this that you would have liked to have got across to people?

Jasmine Basran 56:16:

I don't think so. Actually, I feel like we covered quite a lot in the last hour.

Peter McCormack 56:20:

Fantastic.

Jasmine Basran 56:21:

Yeah.

Peter McCormack 56:22:

Well, listen, if people want to support Crisis, tell them how they can do it. Give a shout-out to the charity here.

Jasmine Basran 56:28:

Please sign up to our In This Together campaign. It's not just supporting Crisis, but it's to support lots of local organisations as well. And that's the kind of right

now, it would be just really, really helpful to offer that support. We also did a call out for all of our volunteers who do volunteer with us throughout the year and our Crisis at Christmas. And we're looking at how we can pull all those people who have come forward, how we can safely support them to volunteer in different ways with local organisations or with us to support people who are experiencing homelessness. Please do get in touch if you are able to volunteer and can give us your time in that way. That would be fantastic.

Peter McCormack 57:12:

And where do they find out about your In This Together campaign?

Jasmine Basran 57:15:

It's on our website, on www.crisis.org.uk. There's information about our In This Together.

Peter McCormack 57:23:

Well, listen, I think you're doing amazing work through the most challenging times and helping some of the most vulnerable people. I absolutely salute the work you and all the charities working in the sector are doing. Look, I wish you the best, Jasmine. Please stay in touch. If in the future you ever want to come back on because you've got any important story you want tell, you know me now so please reach out and just stay safe and I wish you the best.

Jasmine Basran 57:46:

Thank you so much, and for you too. Thank you for giving me so much time to talk about the issues facing, for people facing homelessness. It's really, really great to be able to kind of get that out there and stay safe as well. Thank you so much.