

# MY HOPES FOR A HOMEFUL SOCIETY

Jo Richardson reflects on the fundraising campaign, research project and long-distance walk that mark her CIH presidency this year



**On a bright, but chilly, morning it was my first day of a voluntary experience during the Spring of 1991, and I was with a group of people on a purposefully reconditioned bus in New York heading to a street corner where people experiencing homelessness were congregating for food, advice, first aid and a listening ear. In the company of fellow charity volunteers, I met people young and old, with varying life experiences that had brought them to a situation where they had nowhere to lay their head at night – nowhere to call home.**

I was particularly struck by the stories of younger people – my own age at that time – who could only worry about today, rather than dream about tomorrow. I had been fortunate in my own life to have a stable and loving home environment – a place to call home that I had never had the need to second guess.

That voluntary experience was the spark for a passion to understand ‘home’ and to do what I could to help people find home. Starting in practice for local authority and housing association providers, then onto a policy related role and into academia, I have been a career-

long member of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), whose vision is to support housing professionals to create a future in which everyone has a place to call home. It is, therefore, such a privilege to be president of CIH in 2022 and to be leading a campaign combining action research and fundraising for End Youth Homelessness (Llamau is a member) to explore housing-led approaches to resolve and prevent homelessness in all its guises.

## HOPEFUL AND HOME

I’ve made up the word homeful – it is a mixture of hopeful and home

(and an antonym to homeless), and it encapsulates my vision for the campaign. We know that there has been a growing set of housing and homelessness crises. For example, in December 2021, Shelter's analysis of the homelessness data in England showed that 274,000 people were homeless – with 2,700 people sleeping rough, 15,000 people in direct access hostels and 250,000 people in temporary accommodation (which for many families is not very temporary). In Wales, also in December 2021, Shelter Cymru reported that one in three people in Wales were living in unsafe or unaffordable housing.

This data shows that many people are a long way from 'home'. In my book *Place and Identity: The Performance of Home* (2019) I argued that there were six 'conditions' needed to create 'home': affordability, security, safety, quality, privacy and connectedness. In some cases, people are having to sleep on the streets, they don't have basic shelter. Others have a roof over their head but it may be unsafe, insecure, unaffordable, utilising shared spaces with lack of privacy, in areas away from friends and family. In all cases they do not have 'home', they are homeless.

The homeful research project was launched in Summer 2021. It is working from the basis that the evidence of housing need and homeless experience is evident and that it would now be helpful to look at what has been done by housing providers over the last few years, what can be done to continue to try to resolve and prevent homelessness, and what is possible in the future.

### COLLECTING DATA

The research includes responses from housing providers, homeless organisations, partner agencies, charities, people who have experienced homelessness and housing residents across the UK. We are currently in the process of collecting data – mostly qualitative – and we aim to analyse findings and share learning across all parts of the UK, and would love to hear from people in Wales who have read this article and would like to get involved (please email [homeful@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:homeful@dmu.ac.uk) to make contact). I believe this is a particularly timely piece of work and will provide an opportunity to reflect on what worked in the response to the pandemic and what further needs to be done to ensure sustainable, affordable housing is available for those who need it.

Fundraising to support End Youth

Homelessness has been a large part of the homeful campaign project. The work of individuals and organisations who have joined the fundraising continues to the end of 2022. My 'big walk' was completed May 30. The walk on the South West Coast Path (from Minehead in Somerset to Poole in Dorset - England's longest and, reportedly, most arduous path) was partly inspired having read Raynor Winn's book *The Salt Path* which included the author's own experience of homelessness.

My walk was undertaken over 54 days in total, but with the majority completed in 46 continuous days of walking between mid-April and the end of May 2022. It consisted of 630 miles, 35,000 metres (115,000 feet) of climbs and descents (four times Mount Everest), 26,000 stairs up and down, 12 ferries (+ one train at Starcross as the ferry wasn't running), 436 stiles clambered, 880 gates opened and closed, 1,718,651 footsteps taken, 135,000

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calories burned. £35,852 funds raised so far. There is still plenty of time to make a contribution via the Justgiving page [www.justgiving.com/campaign/homeful](http://www.justgiving.com/campaign/homeful) even the smallest amount is an incredible act of generosity for a fantastic cause.

### PERSPECTIVE AND A STRONG SENSE OF WELLBEING

It has been an amazing experience to have walked this beautiful (and quite tough) path. The opportunity to see incredible wildlife in the sea, in the air and on land has been a privilege. The scenery has been breath-taking, the visible long-term history of our world writ large in the strata of the rock. I have found perspective and a strong sense of wellbeing. I met some incredible people on the path - sometimes I stopped to have a quick chat with those going the opposite way to me, (a lot of the path is narrow, you have to stop to let each other



pass). Others I met whilst sitting on a bench, looking at the view, drinking a coffee, or checking the map to figure out where I was going. And then there were some people going in my direction who I walked with for the rest of the day.

Nearly every local person I talked to had a story about unaffordable housing affecting them or people, particularly young people, they knew in rural coastal communities where the balance between tourism, holiday lets and homes for local people has not yet been achieved. Indeed, I walked past many empty

properties in towns and villages out of holiday season – homes that were unavailable and unaffordable for local people to let.

I have gained perspective from the walk – I had to stop now and then to take a breather and to look back, because you get a different view – you can see where you've come from and that perspective can also help navigate where you need to go to. We need to remember to do this as a sector, to take a look at what we have done, what has worked and what hasn't – in order to provide homes for the future. Looking back to that Spring morning in New York 31 years ago I wonder how far we've really come as a society, there is certainly a long way still to go. Housing is a human right. We all need a home.

Jo Richardson is president of the Chartered Institute of Housing