

TAKE NOTICE!

#4
MARCH 2024

Written by and for people who have experienced homelessness, or know what it's like to live in unsafe, unaffordable, unsuitable housing. Together we can make a real difference to the housing emergency in Wales.



Thoughts from Temporary Accommodation

Living in a hotel room
by **Dawn**, Take Notice Member

For the last 10 months, I've been a Holiday Inn room by myself. I've been moved once from one room to another because I was being harassed, but other than that I've been in the same room. I have a bathroom, a double bed and a kettle. There are 2 microwaves for the whole hotel and three fridge freezers for sharing.

I think about 200 people are here in the same situation – single people, couples and families. I've seen lots of people come and go. People have come in after me and left before – that's quite hard to deal with. It doesn't seem fair, but that's the reality of temporary accommodation.

I became homeless because of domestic violence. I had been in the relationship for 23 years and living with him for 2008 to 2021, so 13 years. Because my son was over 18 when we got kicked out, we were separated. I don't have anything, I had to leave it all behind for my own safety. I lost everything.

Being here is so stressful, my anxiety is through the roof, I've been so depressed, you're always looking behind your back because you don't know who is around. All sorts of things are going on here.

I can't work because I'm on anti-depressants and sleeping tablets, I've had to request PIP because I'm not fit for work. The whole process was a bit degrading, I've always worked, but I can't now. Even if I was well enough to work, I would need to travel well over an hour because the hotel is out in the sticks.

It's all had such a big affect on me and my family. I'm not allowed to have visitors where I am and visiting other people is so hard. My son works long hours so I don't see him as often as I want to. He has 2 children, ages 2 and 5 months. I rarely see them and I'm not able to help with baby-sitting or anything. I do try and do a bit of cleaning and washing for them when I'm there.

I used to do much more. I can't do it now because I haven't got any washing facilities – I need to go to a laundrette which is about any hour away, it's so expensive – 2 loads costs between £13 and £16. We've had 2 deaths in the family this year and I haven't been able to support my family or grieve with them. I know my son is struggling.

When I got put here, I contacted my MP and they advised that I would be at least 18 months. The local council have accepted duties, but there is nothing suitable available. I am bidding every week when there are one-bed properties available, there haven't been any for the last 2 weeks. One week there were 8 and I bid on all of them, but I wasn't successful.

// I feel forgotten about"

I have been told to look at private rentals, but I can't afford it and I can't cope with the idea of losing another home if the landlord decides to sell. I want security. I need social housing. I've done everything by the book and I'm still sat here.

My mental health has really suffered. I feel forgotten about. I think I've slipped through the net. Even Shelter Cymru can't really do anything for me now because the council have accepted their duty to house me, there just aren't enough properties around. I just have to wait.

I've worked all my life and have been in social housing since I was 16. I need help and I'm not getting it. So much more needs to be done to support people.

// So much more needs to be done to support people"

Projects Corner

Alongside our advice services, Shelter Cymru runs local projects all over Wales which strive to end the housing emergency in different ways.

THE ARIAN PROJECT

Many of our clients have money worries which make their housing situation more challenging. Wales has seen the highest rent rises in the UK, but housing benefits have remained the same. Private rents have skyrocketed, 6 out of 10 people are struggling to pay their energy bills and many are cutting back on groceries and using food banks.

Our staff are housing specialists, but with housing & money matters being so closely linked, the Arian project was set up in 2023 to enable our staff to provide clients with debt, welfare and budgeting advice. The aim of the project is to support people to maximise their incomes and feel more confident to manage their money to help them escape or avoid homelessness.



ASK THE TRAINERS!

Like so many things, the housing sector is FULL of jargon. Shelter Cymru's training department tries to help us all make sense of it.

What does being Intentionally Homeless mean?

Even though the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 says that there should be help for everyone who is homeless or threatened with homelessness, there are still times where that help can be limited. When deciding if someone should be offered accommodation, the local authority might look at whether that person has done something or failed to do something which led to them becoming homeless.

It can be difficult to imagine that people lose their homes 'on purpose', but examples of intentional homelessness include if someone:

- didn't pay the rent or mortgage when they could have
- was evicted for antisocial behaviour
- left accommodation which was available and reasonable to live in

Find out more on intentional homelessness [here](#).

DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION FOR OUR TRAINERS? If you do, please email

getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk and we'll ask the trainers!



WALES&WEST
UTILITIES

The Arian project is partly funded by Wales & West Utilities and we have been working with them to help people be safe in their homes. Carbon Monoxide has been a key focus. To stay safe:

- **Get an audible carbon monoxide alarm in every room with a gas appliance and test it regularly**
- **Make sure that gas appliances such as gas boilers, gas cookers and gas heaters are serviced annually**
- **Know the signs of carbon monoxide...**

Floppy yellow or orange flames – they should be crisp and blue



The pilot light on your boiler going out frequently

Extra condensation inside your windows

Soot or yellow stains around appliances

The symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are similar to the flu or food poisoning but without a high temperature.

If your alarm sounds, or you suspect carbon monoxide, take action: move outside into fresh air, leaving doors and windows open as you go. Call the National Gas Emergency Service on 0800 111 999. In a medical emergency, don't delay, call 999 immediately.

If you want more information on Carbon Monoxide, please visit the [Wales & West Utilities website](#).

PEER RESEARCH AT SHELTER CYMRU



By Mark Eaton-Lees

I have been a peer researcher with Shelter Cymru since October and the time has flown.

I first applied for the role back in April 2023 after a recommendation from my university lecturer but unfortunately, nobody was in the post to look at my application, fast forward to the Shelter Cymru conference and I was lucky enough to meet Jennie Bibbings who asked me to reapply, and I was accepted as a casual peer researcher.

After meeting Lauren, it was something I knew I wanted to do. The support from Lauren has been amazing, from 121 weekly check-ins to monthly Teams calls with the whole peer research team.

Recently I was involved in the Torfaen project and seeing my name on the research paper was surreal. We have another project starting soon and I am excited to hit the ground running with it and to see the good come from it.

As a peer research team, we get regular training for Peer research, but we also get access to the Shelter Cymru training portal which has helped me immensely with my role and with my university studies.

The team I work with are all welcoming and friendly and we work to each other's strengths and weaknesses. I have been welcomed by Shelter Cymru and I have been involved in many projects alongside my Peer Research role.



Are you interested in Peer Research?

Shelter Cymru Peer Researchers have lived experience of housing insecurity and use this with their other skills in our research work. **This is a paid opportunity with full training provided and no minimum hours requirement.** No experience is necessary, just a passion to inform our Fight for Home through research and data.

If you're interested in knowing more contact Lauren, the Peer Research Support Officer on 07920 752468 or laurenc@sheltercymru.org.uk

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk if you are interested in any of the following:

18 April

Bucket Collection: Asda, Wrexham

21 April

Event: Wrexham 10K

24 and 25 April

Focus Group: Communication

Join us online to discuss ways to improve our communication with the people we support.

27 April

Bucket Collection: Sainsbury's, Pontypridd

11 May

Event: Caernarfon Food Festival

17 May

Newsletter Content Deadline

If you have ideas or content for the June edition of this newsletter, please let us know by 17 May.

19 May

Event: Gorseinon 10K, Swansea

20 May

Take Notice Virtual Get-Together

Join the **Take Notice network** online for:

- work on Shelter Cymru's 'Rent Increases' leaflet
- free training - Story Telling to Influence

9 June

Event: Swansea Half Marathon

23 June

Event: Connah's Quay Annual Festival

We're so grateful to our brilliant volunteers, who help to power the fight for home and make a huge difference to the lives of people in housing need across Wales. We exist to defend the right to a safe home, but we can't do it without you.



Our New Head of Campaigns

After a very busy few weeks in his new role as Shelter Cymru's Head of Campaigns, Robin White answered a few questions for us. Thank you for your time, Robin.

Are there any specific examples from anyone with lived experience of homelessness that continue to influence you?

It's not about a specific person, but one thing from my career that stays with me is my time working at a housing association and seeing the work being done with young people aged 16 to 18 in supported accommodation. Two things struck me from this, firstly how horrific it was that so many young people at 16 /17, often with multiple and complex needs, were homeless; and how hard it was, and still is, to get them the right support. And secondly, what a difference that support can make. It was also clear to see how much a settled home mattered and that was going to be central to everything they could go on to do.

Do you have any positive words for people currently in housing crisis in Wales?

I'm hesitant to say something positive because things are really tough right now and progress to change that continues to be slow. However, one thing that I draw some positive from is that public awareness of the challenges in housing and homelessness has clearly grown. Ultimately, because so many of the changes we need are political, growing public awareness should make it easier to get the changes we actually need – and that might be a positive. Sadly, that growing awareness is driven by things getting worse, which isn't a situation we want to rely on driving change.

How will you involve our volunteers & staff who have lived experience of housing crisis or homelessness?

In the past I've worked hard to engage the voice of lived experience in policy and campaigning work. This has included things like the production of policy reports and creating space for those voices to help understand problems and shape recommendations. On shaping recommendations in particular, I think the value of lived experience shines through clearly. I remember on one occasion working on a major report for Shelter in England where space had been created to take policy ideas and recommendations to those with lived experience regularly. That approach yielded huge benefit because people with experience of housing issues were able to very quickly identify and explain what wouldn't work, what needed to change, what had been missed and ultimately help develop a product that works better for people. I always say it helped move us from the theoretical to the practical and as an approach it really guides the way I think about how we can be creating policy and how we should be doing campaigns work. I hope to do much more of that in Shelter Cymru.

If you are interested in getting involved with our Campaigns work, please let us know.

GET INVOLVED WITH SHELTER CYMRU AND JOIN THE FIGHT FOR HOME

- Join Take Notice to work with local authorities to help them understand how to improve their housing services.
- Our Fundraising team organise regular events across Wales to help us raise funds and spread the word about our fight for home. Why not join us?
- We are recruiting Peer Researchers to speak to staff, service users and the public to better understand the barriers to housing and inform our campaign work.
- We run regular focus groups with people who have used Shelter Cymru services to help us continually improve what we do. We are looking for participants and facilitators to help to run these sessions.
- We need your help to review our Shelter Cymru Advice Online webpages to make them as accessible, useful and informative as possible.

To find out more, email getinvolved@sheltercymru.org.uk