

CIH CANADA STUDY TOUR LONDON (UK) MAY 2024

Summary
Notes



By **Nick Falvo**, PhD

July 2024



Table of Contents

Study tour overview	2
Overview of England’s Social Housing System	3
Q&A session with Rick	5
Day 1: Monday, May 6, 2024	6
Plentific	6
A brief history of Peabody Estates: A historical walking tour	7
Day 2: Tuesday, May 7, 2024	8
Poplar HARCA	8
Peabody	10
Day 3: Wednesday, May 8, 2024	11
L&Q Housing	11
Homeless Link	13
Day 4: Thursday, May 9, 2024	16
Connection at St. Martins	16
St Mungo’s	18
Day 5: Friday, May 10, 2024	20
Your Place	20
The Passage	22
Appendix 1: Affordable housing and homelessness in London, England [blog post]	24
Appendix 2: List of Participants	26
Appendix 3: Helsinki 2025	27

Study tour overview

The Chartered Institute of Housing Canada (CIH Canada), in partnership with the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) and Nick Falvo Consulting, organized a housing and homelessness study tour of London (United Kingdom). Consisting of 30 participants, mostly from Canada's non-profit sector and government, it took place in May 2024, touring 10 sites over a five-day period. Two virtual presentations were held beforehand in order to orient participants to England's social housing sector and homelessness system. The present document provides an overview of the study tour—this includes a summary of both virtual presentations and all London site tours.

Overview of England's Social Housing System

*Virtual presentation by
James Prestwich*

Date: 16 April 2024

***James Prestwich is Executive Director of Policy & External Affairs,
Chartered Institute of Housing).***

The 1960s saw a rebirth of government's role in housing. *Cathy Come Home*, a 1966 movie, played a major role in the move to address slum housing [note: the full movie is available on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGL4b25AjpM>].

Several philanthropic organizations began to play a role.

By 1981, a large number of social housing units had been created. There were a total of 5.1 million social housing units at this time.

However, from 1979 onwards, there was a gradual erosion of social housing units in England. That year, Thatcher came to power. She introduced Right to Buy for Council tenants. Council tenants had the right to buy their homes for a significant discount. Right to Buy still gets talked about a lot today. Large family homes got sold.

Right to Buy did not bring about new supply. Eventually, many Right to Buy units became private units, and they were not replaced. It effectively became a mass selloff of social housing, many of which are now being rented on the private market.

Concern grew in the early 2000s about the quality of social housing units.

Local authorities (i.e., municipal governments) started transferring their housing stock to housing associations. In some cases, new housing associations were created. Lots of stock was demolished and not replaced.

Since 2010, there's been quite a bit of austerity that's hit the social housing sector rather hard. Government encouraged higher rent levels in new social housing units. Rent levels across the sector increased.

By 2022, we had just 4 million social housing units (down from 5.1 million in 1981). And of course,

England's population had increased substantially during that time.

Today, 16% of English households live in social housing.

Supply of new rental isn't high enough today, so we have the under-supply of social housing and growing homelessness.

We have 1.3 million people today on England's social housing wait list.

We have lots of persons housed temporarily in bed and breakfasts and hotels. Also, much of the temporary accommodation is located outside of London, away from the household's community (and other social supports).

Several housing authorities have declared themselves bankrupt in the past few years.

We have challenges with overseas investors buying homes, some of which remain vacant. That housing becomes 'safe havens' for peoples' capital.

Sometimes newcomers are taking the blame for our lack of housing. Immigration is becoming weaponized.

Mixed tenure is very much the new direction over the past 20-30 years. It can be less stigmatizing.

My organization, CIH, wants the right kinds of housing units built, not the kinds developers want to build for the greatest profit. Developers are very effective at making the case that they can't turn a profit if they include too many affordable units in their new developments.

A major focus today is the quality of existing stock. This was brought into sharp focus by the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower (west London) in 2017. Over 70 people

died, and that brought into sharp focus the quality of social housing in England.

A few years ago, a two-year old boy in Manchester named Awaab Ishak died as a result of chronic damp mould.

Over the past few years, there's been a social media campaigner who has been very effective at drawing awareness to a lack of quality in social housing.

Funders are now starting to prioritize quality of existing stock, which may be diverting funding away from new supply (which is desperately needed).

As a country, we're trying to get to Net Zero by 2050. This will result in increased costs for social housing providers.

Quality of service is also growing as an issue. Are landlords responding to tenants appropriately?

***Virtual presentation by
Rick Henderson***

Date: 24 April 2024

Rick Henderson is CEO of Homeless Link, the national membership body for the homelessness sector in England with over 800 member organizations (mostly in the non-profit sector). Prior to joining Homeless Link in 2012, he was CEO of Action for Advocacy. Rick is a member of the government's Rough Sleeping Advisory Board and is an active member of Feantsa the European Homelessness network.

Homeless Link provides lots of support to front-line providers. We assist with training and data.

We do lots of policy-influencing and campaigning.

Homeless Link has about 110 staff (but we do not provide front-line services).

We have a £5 million per year software company.

We're based in London but we cover the whole of England. We do some work in Wales (but neither Scotland nor Ireland).

Our offices are based in the City, in London. "We're surrounded by unspeakable wealth."

Back in the day, a Rough Sleepers' Initiative helped get rid of 'cardboard cities.' That was successful, but we've lost momentum since.

When we hosted the 2012 Olympics, Mayor Boris Johnson wanted to sweep the homeless in advance of tourists coming. Money was made available. Numbers went down. It was great. Then, politicians got bored, funds got cut, and numbers went back up.

Rough sleeping numbers are high now. We have seen 20% annual, year-over-year increases in recent years.

You'll see visible evidence of rough sleeping when you're in London. You'll see it everywhere. Very few people you see experiencing homelessness speak English, as very few of them are from the UK. We call it "migration homelessness." About 80% of our rough sleepers today are not from the UK, and this makes it challenging to get funding support to address it. Non-UK homelessness is the biggest topic of the day right now.

We also have families in temporary accommodation (i.e., B and Bs, hotels), including families with children (this includes 165,000 children). These figures are off the charts, and billions are being spent on temporary accommodation.

£10 million per day are now spent on temporary accommodation in London.

The closer you get to the centre of London, the worse it is. Numbers are smaller as you leave the centre.

There are at least 200 homelessness NGOs in London. Some are London-wide, while others are specific to a borough or region. All of the major national homelessness NGOs are based in London, many close to Homeless Link offices.

Our national government is based a stone's throw from our offices, across the River Thames in Westminster.

Our current Mayor is a strong advocate for addressing homelessness.

We have London Councils as well—the network of London's 32 or 33 boroughs/councils. Each one of them puts their own funds into homelessness provision.

We have some great Housing First models, including some for women. We have some great employment, volunteer and mentoring projects as well, including specific projects for women and youth. Lots of great work is happening with respect to women.

We also have some great day centres.

We tend not to have large shelters here. Many have been closed down. Others were repurposed in order to offer more self-contained apartment-style accommodation (this was accelerated during the COVID pandemic). We tend not to have more than 100 people in one shelter here; the trend has been toward smaller accommodation.

All of our shelters are completely full. Stays are very long. This means no beds for people who are new to the shelter.

Lots of data work, including CHAIN (a London-wide rough sleeper database that's filled in in real time, filled out by outreach workers).

Every now and then there will be a sweep of people who are homeless in London. But generally speaking, we don't find the police to be too heavy-handed.

There are problems with gangs and aggressive begging. It's organized by gangs sometimes, and peoples' passports are kept in order to hold them ransom.

Our housing and homelessness systems aren't sufficiently integrated, in my opinion. Until a few years ago, they were connected in terms of federal ministerial responsibility; but it's since been separated (possibly with some animosity between the two ministries).

Hotels have become the new homeless shelters.

Also, homeless organizations are now in competition with refugee organizations for many of these hotels.

Q&A session with Rick

Keith Hambly: *Any talk re: converting hotels into housing?*

Rick: *Not really. Maybe outside of London, with some B and Bs. But not the large hotels in central London. Having said that, London authorities have been buying property outside of London (e.g., seaside places) where they've been shipping London's homeless folk. There's currently a London council financing the construction of a large building 30 miles outside of London.*

Fiona Crossing: *Talk about the variety of the 200 NGOs in London that are operating in this space.*

Rick: *To be fair, this just represents 6-7 per borough, and some are very small. Commissioned organizations are mandated by local government, with government funding. Non-Commissioned organizations tend to be church or volunteer groups doing things on their own. Some of this makes it challenging for a person experiencing homelessness to know when/how to start their journey.*

Jenn Anderson: *How do you link up services when things can get so political?*

Rick: *It was hard to get momentum on Housing First due to perception that recipients were getting free housing without even having to work. So our national government has now been "piloting" Housing First for six years.*

Rick: *During COVID, we dragged health officials kicking and screaming to the table. Now they're starting to leave the table.*

Day 1: Monday, May 6, 2024

Plentific

Address:

Plentific

Yarnwick
119, 121 Cannon St
EC4N 5A5

Site leaders:

Cem Savas

CEO & Co-Founder
Email: cem.savas@plentific.com

One can view Plentific as an Uber-style solution to home repairs and maintenance, connecting contractors to units. They speed up work orders, largely through technology.

Ideally, with Plentific in place, a resident brings attention to a problem in a unit, and a contractor arrives the next day to fix it.

Most of Plentific's clients previously had systems to receive concern from tenant—but prior to Plentific, the tenant could not see the progress as it unfolded. Housing providers were not advising tenants as to where the problem was sitting, or how much longer it was going to be. Plentific changes this in much the same way a customer can watch the progress of their Uber ride in an app.

Our system also has Plan Bs and Plan Cs for vendors, for each job (in case there's a problem with the first choice).

Residents are also able to provide, in real time, reviews of how the contractor did. So we are all able to see which contractor has a 9.6 score, for example. And this allows us to find out about problems right away.

Plentific is also able to advise housing providers on appropriate prices for various types of contracts, depending on what geographic region they are in.

Plentific has helped speed up the process of moving a new tenant into a unit after it is vacated.

In the UK, social media has allowed residents to raise public concerns about unit quality very quickly. There have also been some high profile stories (e.g., Grenfell Tower fire). Some tenants have also discovered ambulance-chasing lawyers to help them with their cases. Governments have responded with more regulations.

With UK's exit from the EU, the country has had more labour challenges (e.g., not as many Eastern European workers).

Plentific currently works with 150 large housing providers—it has some role with more than half of all social housing providers in the UK.

Plentific has been headquartered in London 10 years ago, and now have offices in Berlin and New York City.

Plentific now has 1.6 million housing units (mostly affordable units) on their platform, as well as approximately 5,000 vendors.

A brief history of Peabody Estates: A historical walking tour

Site leader:

Christine Wagg

Historian

Email: christine.wagg@peabody.org.uk

Tour started at Westminster Abbey, in part because George Peabody (founder of the Peabody Trust) had his funeral there.

George Peabody was an American businessman and philanthropist who eventually made London his home. He became interested in housing and made his first housing-related donation in 1862 (at a time when there was considerable slum dwelling and no government involvement in housing for low-income persons). This enabled his five trustees to provide estates of affordable housing within an eight-mile radius of a point in the heart of the City of London.

Initially, the Peabody trustees would purchase buildings on the private market, demolish existing buildings and construct blocks of flats which could be let at affordable weekly rents. Whenever the size of the site allowed, the architect would arrange the blocks round a central courtyard, which served a crucial role for children to play. The space would also be used for parties to celebrate national events such as coronations or Royal jubilees, and also the ends of the two world wars.

From the 1860s to the 1880s, Peabody Trust built 19 estates throughout London. The blocks on the earlier estates were typically four stories in height, but the eight estates which were built in the 1880s were part of London's first slum clearance schemes, so the pressure to house a larger number of people forced the trustees to build blocks six stories in height. The flats were not self-contained; washrooms and laundry spaces were shared but every flat included provision for residents to heat their rooms by coal and to cook meals. Coal was purchased in bulk; residents then bought their coal from Peabody more cheaply than if they had ordered it from a coal merchant.

In the early days, all of Peabody's residents had to be vaccinated against smallpox.

Also in the early days, Peabody was run exclusively by men. A Superintendent lived on each estate; he collected the rents and enforced the rules, as well as handling applications for vacant flats. Porters worked for the Superintendent, doing cleaning and minor repairs. The wives of the porters were expected to supervise the bathhouses on the nights reserved for female tenants to use the baths.

There were very strict rules against overcrowding. As your household grew larger, you had to move to a larger unit.

Each estate had "pram sheds" for which a small additional rent was charged. There were no elevators; parents of young children would leave their pram (i.e., stroller) in the shed and then walk up several flights of stairs to their flat.

Over the past 160 years, Peabody has gone through several changes. Shared facilities have been abolished and every flat is now self-contained; as a result, the flats are larger and there are fewer flats per block. Flats now conform to stricter fire regulations and most have central heating. Peabody has acquired many early housing blocks from other providers; it has merged with other housing associations and those mergers have widened its area of operations right across London and the surrounding counties. Peabody also continues to build new housing developments [to be further discussed on Day 2 of the present study tour].

Historically, Peabody has not housed the very poorest of households. Rather, they have focused on moving lower-income households out of inadequate, unhealthy housing into better housing.

Day 2: Tuesday, May 7, 2024

Poplar HARCA

Site Leaders:

Babu Bhattacherjee

Director of Communities & Neighbourhoods
Email: babu.bhattacherjee@poplarharca.co.uk

Chris Clarke

Project Director
Email: chris.clarke@poplarharca.co.uk

Ian Lamprell

Project Director
Email: Ian.Lamprell@poplarharca.co.uk

Daniel Rose

Spotlight Director
Email: Daniel@wearespotlight.com

Based in one of London's poorest areas, Poplar HARCA is a housing provider with a very strong focus on community development. Dickens wrote about this part of London.

Poplar HARCA is just 25 years old.

They have several neighbourhood centres of their own.

They also have a youth centre called Spotlight Youth Centre, which has boxing and other sports, music, and employment [more on Spotlight below].

Poplar HARCA has about 10,000 homes (with 25,000 residents), all of which are within a 20-minute walk from each other. This means residents get to know their neighbourhood rather well. So this is a very different model—it is a very small geographic area for this many units from one provider.

The organization is resident-led. More than 50% of Poplar HARCA's board members were initially residents. But now that 50% is broader—if Poplar HARCA cannot find residents, they invite people working in the neighbourhood or nearby. Also, none of Poplar HARCA's board members are elected officials from the local municipality—it was found that they did not add much value.

Poplar HARCA sometimes clashes with the local government when trying to engage in planning (the local municipality sees planning as their job). The two parties do not always see eye to eye.

Poplar HARCA consists mostly of mid-rise and high-rise apartments (e.g., 6-18 stories).

Some residents can 'rent to own.'

The organization aims to have at least 35% of new developments being "affordable." This includes social rent (i.e., RGI), intermediate (e.g., something between social rent and market rent) and shared ownership. About half of the "affordable" is social rent. Housing benefits (demand side assistance for tenants) help pay this rent.

Poplar HARCA prides itself on being 'tenure blind.' That means you should be able to walk by a building and not know which specific income groups live in that building.

The organization receives both government and charitable grants.

Poplar HARCA also has a commercial portfolio. There are commercial shops on their property. "We believe in having a mix of larger and small merchants." There was a bank on their land but it left; they hope to get one back.

Poplar HARCA has a regeneration plan including Crisp Street Market that runs through until 2030-31. Some existing buildings will be knocked down during this process. It will happen in a staggered way. The Festival of Britain clock tower is a "listed building" and will be preserved and restored. They don't want to disrupt the functioning of the shopping market, and don't want to cause too much disruption/displacement of residents. Some residents are being moved into nearby existing Poplar HARCA stock. All relocated residents have a right to return.

It acquired stock via transfers from what used to be council housing (i.e., public housing).

It initially had 80% social housing. Now it's headed towards 50% (but not by reducing total social housing stock – in fact it is increasing total social housing stock, but not as quickly as other types). There is cross subsidy via a mixed model.

About 40% of Poplar HARCA's residents are Bangladeshi (the figure for youth is roughly 80%).

They have an employment and training hub which supports approximately 1,000 residents a year to get an accredited qualification.

The Spotlight youth service is dedicated entirely to youth aged 11-19. Historically, there would have been maybe one youth worker, some table tennis—not much more. Previously, youth would access services in clusters, often according to program. It was a patchwork, and youth were not always doing things together. This creates groupthink. Poplar HARCA feels it is important that all genders be welcome and,

ideally, doing things together. There is less groupthink now.

Spotlight's focus is on what the youth want, not on what their parents want.

Some of the young people are at risk of exploitation.

The Spotlight building for youth cost about £7 million to build and includes a beautiful auditorium, which includes a dance area. It also has a music studio and a boxing gym. Young people came up with the name Spotlight. It is the Spotlight brand used here, not the Poplar HARCA brand (which some youth find stigmatizing).

The youth program is funded through a mix of fundraising, grants and rent revenue.

Youth are also involved in our governance.

Spotlight engages with 4,000 young people (unique individuals) per year. Youth are also involved in Poplar HARCA's governance.

Peabody

Site Leaders:

Elly Houtt

Chief Operating Officer

Email: elly.houtt@peabody.org.uk**Rupesh Bhatt**

Director of Data

Email: rupesh.bhatt@peabody.org.uk**Richard Ellis**

Director of Sustainability

Email: richard.ellis@peabody.org.uk**Sahil Khan**Director of Community Strategy, Funding and
PartnershipsEmail: sahil.khan@peabody.org.uk**Phil Jenkins**

Executive Director, Development

Email: phil.jenkins@peabody.org.uk

Peabody is now 162 years old, founded by George Peabody [see notes above from Monday afternoon's historical tour].

Peabody now has 180,000 homes, mostly in London.

Peabody is a charity. No profits, no shareholders.

The organization's data have allowed them to zero in on the 700 residents with the highest likelihood to make a complaint, in order to assess commonalities, trends and reasons for complaints.

Peabody plans to be Net Zero Carbon by 2050. Green spaces will help that (they have 101,000 trees). So too will insulation. Peabody will need to talk to its tenants about how they heat their units. Peabody also tries to get/procure greener energy.

Peabody has drones with infrared cameras flying around the estates. That links up with machine learning, and they try to teach the system how to search for heat loss.

Peabody tries to help its tenants get into sustainable careers (not just low-paid work). And they like to focus those efforts on neighbourhoods with low levels of economic activity. This involves networking with local businesses.

Peabody has a system now where they reach out to tenants they have not heard from in awhile.

Peabody has 5,700 units currently under construction, 80% of which are affordable in one sense or another ("affordable" includes both social rent levels which are very low, and other levels closer to market).

Because Peabody lacks in-house construction expertise, they like to enter joint ventures with private developers (e.g., Mount Anvil) where risk and rewards are shared equally with partners. This makes partners keen to add value.

Peabody has lots of development expertise, but they are not so good at managing the construction process. Peabody would monitor the development metrics, but would not oversee construction process.

Under these joint ventures, Peabody sells some leases to private homeowners. But Peabody takes the affordable homes back after construction is complete, at which point the joint venture dissolves. Technically, Peabody buys the affordable units from the joint venture. And on the private units, Peabody gets 50% of the profits on the sale to private homeowners.

Most of Peabody's new tenancies come from the local wait list.

Day 3: Wednesday, May 8, 2024

L&Q Housing

Site Leaders:

Matt Foreman

Executive Director, Customer Services
Email: MattForeman@lqgroup.org.uk

Jacqueline Esimaje-Heath

Director of Development Growth
Email: jesimaje-heath@lqgroup.org.uk

Claire-Louise Brenlund

Sales and Marketing Director
Email: cbrenlund@lqgroup.org.uk

Catherine Dixon

Director of Treasury
Treasury, Infrastructure and Development Finance,
Build to Rent, PRS Guarantee
Email: catherinedixon@lqgroup.org.uk

Neil Talbot

Director Research and Accountability
Email: ntalbot@lqgroup.org.uk

L&Q Housing has more than 108,000 units (more than 250,000 residents). Of these, 64,000 units are social renting (i.e., very low rent). There are also leaseholders (i.e., condos). There are also units at intermediate market rents (usually 80% of market rent). They also have key worker housing, as well as student accommodation. They also have commercial properties.

L&Q Housing owes its size largely to several mergers over the years. *"We've absorbed lots of wobbling housing organizations."* Also, several publicly-owned transfers took place from local authorities.

They are London's largest residential landlord and tend to operate in London's highest-poverty census tracts.

Most of L&Q's units are in and around London (about 90,000 units). About 10,000 units in Manchester.

They work with over 100 local authorities (i.e., municipalities).

L&Q Housing now develops about 3,000 new units per year. They were doing more previously. One year, they delivered 4,200 units (a combination of new builds and acquisition).

L&Q has over 4,000 employees, roughly 450 of whom are on the development team.

Due largely to its size, L&Q Housing is able to borrow on the bond market, securing lower interest rates than through conventional lending. They also borrow in the more conventional ways.

L&Q maintains a credit rating with three credit rating agencies. They target an A rating.

Many of L&Q's lenders want them to be green, in part due to the way they are regulated. So L&Q needs to demonstrate to them, via various Key Performance Indicators, that they are indeed very green.

They have an in-house construction team (representing roughly one-third of their development team). That team directly delivers about one-third of L&Q's new units in any one year.

L&Q has many joint ventures. Private investors like to invest their money with Peabody.

The mix of private and public money entails specific forms or regulation, influenced largely by corporate governance norms. This requires L&Q to have specific types of skills on their board.

L&Q Housing generates considerable revenue through the sale of units.

They do a 50:50 affordable/private split, which allows for cross subsidy.

Shared ownership is also something that L&Q does. They will sell about 2,000 units per year privately which generates revenue (allowing for the cross subsidization mentioned above). Government likes the fact that they rely on both public and private money. It is a rather popular model.

With “shared ownership,” you’re sharing the cost of your home. It’s for people who have trouble with a down payment. So this helps people get into ownership. You can start with 25% of the share, and then up your share over time. There’s never an obligation to eventually buy.

Shared ownership is especially attractive to tenants when mortgage rates are very high.

With shared ownership, the purchaser is responsible for maintenance.

It is hard to underestimate the profound impact of the Grenfell Tower fire on people working the sector. Indeed, things changed in 2017. *“We’ve learned, for example, that many resident complaints on unit quality had been ignored.”*

For L&Q Housing, there will always be some tension between the private and the social. For example, after Grenfell, L&Q diverted resources to existing stock and existing residents. Also, types of persons they had on their board changed.

In 2018, they started to set up a Resident Services Board, which is a committee of their board. Most members of the Resident Services Board are residents. Every board committee also now has

residents on it. *“We now want to knit in that resident perspective into every tier of our organization.”*

“Now, we don’t want our board to make a major strategic decision without resident input. We’d like to get to the point where residents are more involved in budgetary decisions.”

L&Q has a Strategic Land company which buys land and takes the necessary steps to bring sites to market for housing development.

L&Q has a market rent business which owns properties that are made available for rent across London to people who are not eligible for social rent and is intended to make a profit for reinvestment in the charitable enterprise.

In relation to the strategic land and market rent business, see the following article: <https://www.housingtoday.co.uk/news/landq-exploring-sale-of-prs-and-strategic-land-functions/5129540.article>

L&Q has its own energy company which was set up to provide the management of energy supply to properties where district or communal schemes were specified by planners, which means L&Q purchases the energy on wholesale markets, deals with the billing of residents and looks after the infrastructure that supplies the energy to individual homes.

Most new residents coming into L&Q’s social renting units come from waiting lists of local authorities (i.e., local municipalities). A great many of these people have been experiencing absolute homelessness.

Homeless Link

Site Leaders:

Rick Henderson

Chief Executive

Email: rick.henderson@homelesslink.org.uk**Matt Harrison**

Deputy Chief Executive

Email: matt.harrison@homelesslink.org.uk**Kate Alaway**

Head of Member Services

Email: kate.alaway@homelesslink.org.uk

Homeless Link is a membership-based organization with over 800 member organizations throughout England.

We have two major focus areas: 1) improve practice; and 2) influence policy. And we feel these two issues are inextricably linked. *"It's the experience of our members on the ground that influences our advocacy. We act as a funnel/vehicle for the experiences of our members."*

Homelessness practice on the ground has not always been fabulous across England. There have been dark moments in that history (e.g., large shelters).

There is greater focus now on trauma-informed, strengths-based approaches, and ending homelessness.

Some of our work focuses on the entire sector (e.g., workforce).

As recently as 2008, 75% of Homeless Link's funding came from government grants. Matt was brought in to diversify funding streams.

In-Form

We backbone a system called In-Form, a client-based case management system (it's built on the Salesforce platform). We provide it at commercial prices to our members; we then use the revenue to fund our campaigns. Our members subscribe. Each member can customize the platform.

We have 335 customers of varying sizes, which includes 27,000 licenses to use the system

(representing nearly 50% of every staff person in England's homelessness sector). We have four versions (i.e., four membership types), the most basic of which is completely free (with that version, the first three licenses are free, so it's ideal for very small organizations). Homeless Link has 40 staff who just do In-Form (that's 40 out of a total of 110 Homeless Link staff persons). We net about £2 million from this per year (with gross revenue being just over £4 million per year).

Features of In-Form include client records, projects, timelines, needs assessments, risk assessments, support plans, goals and actions, group work, outcomes, client's contacts with external agencies, safeguarding, complaints, housing management, referral forms, document generation, SMS alerts, volunteer management, location maps (e.g., where people have been seen).

We even have one Canadian client: 12 Neighbours Inc. (based in Fredericton, New Brunswick).

Salesforce can convert this into about 25 languages.

The data is owned by the customer (i.e., the organization).

"Shared systems"—that is, where client-level data is shared across organizations—are a challenge. It butts up against privacy/confidentiality. Original goal was "one system." We ran into challenges. For example, some organizations want their own system; and we've since accepted that approach. With the permission of organizations, we can potentially do some sharing.

All of the data is stored by Salesforce. For any organization whose funder or bylaws require them to hold their data in the UK, we can do that.

CHAIN

CHAIN is a database of rough sleeping in London.

Owned and commissioned by the Greater London Authority, it was set up in 2000. Homeless Link has been managing it for the past two years, with about 7 staff.

CHAIN is used by all 35 outreach teams in London (and 120 organizations in total, spanning 1,400 staff across London).

Every time an outreach worker sees a person slouched over in London, they will log that into the database.

It is also used to manage performance of outreach teams.

We can see patterns and trends, and we can map that out against other trends (e.g., economic activity, changes to asylum laws, etc.).

We produce annual and quarterly data reports about CHAIN. You can see them on our website.

Having said that, CHAIN does not tell us where the person was before they slept rough, or afterwards.

Bloomberg Associates have advocated for an improvement to CHAIN. They are creating a data warehouse, merging CHAIN data with various other homelessness databases in London. They take all of this data and link the client-level data. It then creates an anonymized database, which we started running a few months ago.

Every week, we train a batch of new outreach staff on how to use CHAIN. That's done in person.

We also manage the data and assess data quality.

All outreach teams must use CHAIN, as part of their contracts with either the Greater London Authority or local boroughs.

We still have a national Point-in-Time Count in England, but that data quality is poor. It would be ideal if we had CHAIN nationally.

StreetLink

This app allows members of the general public to 'call in' when they see someone sleeping rough.

Calls such as this can assist with advocacy.

It was set up in 2012 and run by Homeless Link until Oct 2023. Now it is run by a tech company.

Over a span of 10 years, we got about 700,000 alerts from the public.

When an alert comes in, our team helps it get to the appropriate local authority. Then we follow up with the member of the general public who called in, passing on to them what the local authority says they will do. And then we ask if it was done. The local authority must be ready to do something once they hear there's someone rough.

StreetLink still receives thousands of alerts per month.

It eventually started to be used by persons experiencing homelessness.

Qualification in Front-Line Homelessness Practice

Generally, there are no formal qualifications needed for people to work in England's homelessness sector. There are no formal standards across the sector.

And we had been hearing from our members that they were struggling to both recruit and retain staff. Several of England's largest homeless-serving agencies have had strikes in the past two years, largely due to pay. People feel valued when they're invested in.

So we partnered with the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), who focus on accreditation.

We categorize this type of training as Level 3 (e.g., age 18 level, but not as many learning hours). Four units are involved.

We have now been running it for a couple of years.

Demand has exceeded our expectations, so much so that we are having trouble meeting it (in part due to there being too few CIH-approved tutors). We would

love to run more cohorts and to have other cohorts, allowing for specialization of various sorts.

We want it to become the go-to qualification for the sector.

Most of the training we do with this initiative is front line.

Day 4: Thursday, May 9, 2024

Connection at St. Martins

Site Leader:

Pam Orchard

CEO

Email: Pam.Orchard@cstm.org.uk

Located in the heart of Westminster city, Connection at St. Martins has been around for over 100 years.

BBC Radio 4 runs a Christmas broadcast appeal each year, and Connection at St. Martins is one of the recipients. So they get on Radio 4 every year, giving them a very large national profile, relative to its small size. They're also a 20-minute walk to Parliament.

They're in the epicentre of rough sleeping in all of the UK, and they focus on rough sleeping.

There is a great deal of affluence in this geographical area of London. Across the street is a bank where you need at least £1million in order to have an account. It's the Queen's bank.

The church next door (St. Martins) has been serving the homeless for at least 105 years (Connection at St. Martins has a governance link with the church).

Connection at St. Martins provides showering, laundry and other basic necessities. They also have things like nursing and vaccinations. They do one-on-one case work support and work with people using drugs and alcohol. Lots of mental health challenges as well.

They are open to women only on Wednesday mornings. The percentage of rough sleepers in the local area who are women has been creeping up over the years. When they open on Wednesday mornings for women only, male staff are not allowed. It is trans inclusive.

They have supportive accommodation (at a different location), and it is just for women. It has 24-hour staffing and is quite expensive to operate. Nearby boroughs can refer. A person must have been a rough sleeper in order to get accepted.

In terms of housing, they like to do the wraparound supports. They do not want to be the landlord. They do not want to manage the building.

There is a statutory definition of rough sleeping, but it's narrow (as it prioritized people for services). Even if you're in a tent, you do not count as a rough sleeper.

Connection at St. Martins has worked to organize regular memorials for persons experiencing homelessness. This helps with the grieving process.

They will not serve people under 18 here, partly due to their insurance program. However, there is a specialist youth rough sleeping service located roughly one mile from here. They're called New Horizon.

Half of London's rough sleepers are not from the UK. London sees lots of new arrivals coming from Romania and Poland especially. Also, there have been large increases from Africa in the past six months.

A major focus of Connection at St. Martins is to build up relationships of trust. *"We also like to work with people rather than work for people (even if the former takes more time). We feel people need trauma-informed care, good mental health support, lots of compassion, a nice environment."*

New approach

When Pam arrived here seven years ago, her predecessor had been in the role for 27 years. The organization seemed spread out rather thinly. They had been doing a lot of different programs. It was not clear who the organization's target client group was.

Pam shook things up a bit. Now, the focus is mostly people sleeping rough in Westminster who have complex needs.

They stopped doing their night centre, they stopped doing the employment program. They expanded outreach and one-to-one support. "I think there's an unfortunate tendency in our sector to desperately want to be needed and then to hang on to people as long as possible. We try to push back against that."

Connection at St. Martins brought in clinical psychologists to help us with their theory of change.

The internal resistance to the new approach was very strong. In 2020, they did a restructuring that resulted in 10 staff leaving, most of whom were longstanding staff.

"Now, we try really hard to get the right staff and build the right culture."

St Mungo's

Site Leaders:

Samantha Cowie

Head of Criminal Justice Services

Email: samantha.cowie@mungos.org**Clara Delmonte**

Custody Manager

Email: Clara.Delmonte@mungos.org**Andrea Ayuso-Morillo**

Team Leader

Email: Andrea.Ayuso-Morillo@mungos.org

St Mungo's is the largest non-profit organization in London's homeless-serving sector. The organization is 55 years old. They have Housing First, several outreach teams on the streets and several small shelters (typically 20-30 residents per shelter).

Programming includes learning, skills training (including construction), employment and gardening.

St Mungo's felt they needed to look at persons experiencing homelessness who are coming out of prisons, as a very large proportion of the organization's service users report contact with the criminal justice system.

"So we first went into a prison, with one worker, in 1998. It quickly became evident that we needed to expand the program. Initially, we got funding directly from the prisons. They would 'buy' a member of staff from us. We did that for about five years."

Then, a national entity was formed that amalgamated the money that prisons used for this kind of service. There have since been subsequent iterations of that same entity.

Now, it is one contract St Mungo's has with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ). *"That is our main contract, and it renews (ideally) every 3-5 years."* There is always some uncertainty with that. St Mungo's has to periodically rebid for the work. And then they supplement it with other funding—e.g., from philanthropists, from banks, etc. They get some funding from London Councils (i.e., a roll up of London's 33 boroughs).

Right now, St Mungo's prison in-reach work focuses on adult men in London.

For their larger MOJ-funded contract, virtually all of the funding they have is for staffing. For smaller funded services such as Housing, Advice, Resettlement and Prevention (HARP) through the gate service funded by London Councils there is a small budget for things like first month's rent, rent incentives and housing deposits. Without this money, housing is very challenging.

St Mungo's is now in 10 London Estate prisons (three of which hold youth prisoners). But they do not work with 'under 16s.' St Mungo's has about 30 FTE staff working on this as well as subcontracting a further 15 posts to a partner agency to deliver to community sentences.

They also provide 'remote support' for non-London returns.

Previously, St Mungo's would wonder around prisons and prisoners could request housing assistance. Now, probation officers in the prisons and in community hold the cases and have a centralized system, from which they make referrals to St Mungo's. *"We then have a timeframe to get to the person, assess their needs and make a recommendation back to the probation officer."*

The probation service is hugely under-resourced, which impacts both the number of referrals received and the quality of the referrals.

The idea is that you focus on the last 8 weeks of sentence, in part because there is not much point in trying to find a person housing before that.

"Short sentences can make it harder for us to line things up with a soon-to-be-released inmate. Also, we sometimes get last-minute referrals (i.e., we often do not get 8 weeks' notice)."

If someone arrives in custody with an existing tenancy, St Mungo's tries to prevent eviction. That way, the person can simply return to their apartment.

"We sometimes look at the possibility of returns to the family home as well."

St Mungo's also helps people understand how to stay housed (e.g., understanding utility bills, cooking, budgeting, etc.).

"We see about 6,000 clients per year. 80% of those released from our services go into accommodation. Over 850 tenancies are saved each year."

St Mungo's is challenged by a severe lack of social housing throughout the UK, as well as by landlord discrimination.

"We try to do 'brief interventions' in order to see more people. We try to see each client within 10 days of referral. We create a plan and set expectations. We gauge what type of housing they are most appropriate for."

Housing associations are supposed to reserve some of their units for social housing. But clients from this program have trouble affording the service charges, particularly if they take paid work. *"We used to have more authority to refer directly to social housing; now, it is more centralized. So our program tends to focus on private renting."*

"L&Q Housing does lease some of their property to us. We have 28 bed spaces through this initiative."

When the probation officers refer to St Mungo's, they have a system that prompts them to assess whether someone is homeless. But probation officers often do not have the knowledge to assess properly (e.g., they don't understand housing, entitlements and the law). Sometimes the referrals are inappropriate. *"So we have designed a training program for new probation staff."*

"We find it is very helpful if somebody meets a prisoner 'at the gate' as they leave prison, the day of release. We used to do that and would ideally like to still do that, but we are no longer funded for it. Now, it is staff from other organizations that sometimes do that (and we help line it up)."

It is possible for inmates to be released without income assistance. St Mungo's staff start those applications in prison. *"We can line things up while the person is in prison."*

Day 5: Friday, May 10, 2024

Your Place

Site Leader:

Amanda Dubarry

CEO

Email: Amanda.Dubarry@your-place.org.uk**Susan Smith**

Head of Support, Frontline Services

Email: Susan.Smith@your-place.org.uk**John Lowery**

Director of Frontline Services

Email: John.Lowery@your-place.org.uk

Your Place focuses on wraparound support and accommodation for singles in Newham, an outer borough of East London. *"We have very high levels of homelessness in this community, and one of the highest rates of rough sleeping in the UK."*

Your Place has one of England's largest homeless shelters (it has 155 beds). They also have rough sleeping services.

They identify as a charity, but we're also a housing association.

They serve people aged 18+.

Lots of migrants, and this is increasing. *"Maybe over 50% of our residents are from migrant populations. Three big ones: Sudan, East Africa, Eastern Europe."*

At Your Place, 30-35% of residents are women (roughly double the % who use homelessness services in general).

Your Place offers mixed gender services, but is are very strongly focused on the needs of women.

"We also have a women's group that meets weekly. It is a great space to hear what is going on and to learn about possible solutions. Clients feel more in control, more empowered."

Your Place has also set up a men's group.

Hope Street

Hope Street was opened in March 2022. The first residents were essentially being evicted from COVID hotels.

It consists of 15 little houses for rough sleepers.

There was a warehouse structure (i.e., an external shell) that had been built, initially with the idea of a social enterprise (to be run by this organization). But when Amanda arrived at Your Place, she did not think a social enterprise should be the organization's top priority. Your Place had not been serving rough sleepers up until this point. *"I wanted us to start helping rough sleepers."*

So she spoke to some architects about repurposing it. They did some pro bono work for the organization. *"They figured out we could create spaces within the outer shell."*

It was inspired by some fishermen's cottages. It is like a little village. They look like houses on the outside.

We call the units "houses."

Each door has a proper lock (not a mag lock). So people have their own key to their own door.

Each unit has a bedroom and bathroom.

There's 24-7 staffing, including security at night.

Focus is long-term rough sleepers (often 20-30 years of rough sleeping per person).

Residents here have very high needs for the most part. Many are active substance users.

"We want to help our residents get into sustainable routes to employment."

Residents can stay at Hope Street for up to two years, so it is in fact transitional housing.

Most are moving out through the Clearing House system. Clearing House is affordable accommodation designated by housing associations. It has about 3,500 units across London. Criteria to get in are that you're a verified rough sleeper. But housing associations have to approve the referrals and they are picky; they do not like to take in high-acuity clients. Clearing House offers two-year fixed tenancies that are renewable. Turnover, however, is very minimal.

The Passage

Site Leaders:

Jenny Travassos

Director of Housing and Services

Email: jenny.Travassos@passage.org.uk

Claire Matthews

Head of Community Services

Email: claire.matthews@passage.org.uk

Midori Hol

Head of Housing and Progression

Email: Midori.hol@passage.org.uk

Terry Web

PHAC Manager (Passage House Assessment Centre)

Email: terry.web@passage.org.uk

The Passage is based in the heart of Westminster (i.e., central London). They have a resource centre, health services, immigration support services, and employment services. They also have about 73 units of supportive housing and provide 'floating support' to another 79 units. They do human trafficking work. They also support people after they leave homelessness.

They now focus on ending homelessness, especially through prevention.

The Passage prides itself on acting quickly to prevent a person's homelessness at the earliest possible opportunity.

The organization has advocated to government to put more emphasis on prevention.

"We'd also like to see government invest more in programs that have demonstrated effectiveness. And we think one entity should be designated to lead (otherwise, it's unclear as to who's responsible). And we of course want to see more social housing built; we like state-owned social housing."

The Passage is mapping links between human trafficking (including modern slavery) and homelessness.

Resource Centre

The resource centre offers lots of services (e.g., laundry, food, health care, addictions worker, chaplaincy, etc.).

It offers employment services, including pre-employment support. The Passage has employment coaching, as well as support with respect to income assistance.

They have a modern slavery navigator, as well as an immigration solicitor.

They have engagement and outreach as well.

The Passage supports people to get into housing, including via the Private Rented Sector (PRS), supported accommodation, and temporary accommodation.

Once people are housed, staff like to check in with them at various stages (multiple times per year).

The Passage has a strong PRS team. They work hard to build relationships with a network of reputable private landlords. Last year, they housed 114 persons. Staff work closely with a group of Orthodox Jewish landlords who are very socially minded; these relationships have been built over many years. Those units tend not to be in this neighbourhood due to the cost; clients must be ready to live elsewhere.

Pre-COVID, Connection at St Martins and The Passage did the same thing (see notes above re: Connection at St. Martins). Post-COVID, the organizations decided to work differently. Now, The Passage tends to focus on prevention, and Connection at St. Martins tends to focus on maintaining relationships with people who have been homeless a long time.

The Passage now puts a strong emphasis on building evidence, identifying desired outcomes and measuring progress. *"We find that when someone has a nice building to live in, they are more likely to take good care of it."*

The Passage has an Experts by Experience (EBE) programme, as well as a Lived Experience Assembly. Staff will put questions to them (e.g., what kinds of images should we use when we portray our service users in our fundraising?). One member of the EBE group is transgender and will get asked for advice on how to work with transgender service users. *"We try to work with the people we work with."*

No Night Out

This consists of short-term hotel stays for persons who have not yet slept on the streets (or who are very recently homeless).

A referral to No Night Out could happen through the assessment centre (see below).

Once the client presents, staff do a quick triage assessment. Qualifying persons go into a hotel for a short stay. Average length of stay in hotel is 10 days.

The goal is to get a quick alternative. It also offers reconnection. Last year, there were 14 international reconnections, and seven within the UK.

With hotels, staff are able to assess a person's readiness for PPS (discussed in previous section).

Assessment Centre (with 37 beds)

The Passage has had this since May 2017. The local authority (i.e., local municipality) came to The Passage and offered the funding to set this up. Previous to this, it was a 2-year stay supported hotel for men.

"We either get people reconnected to where they came from, or we get the person resettled into alternative housing."

You have to be referred here. To come here, you have to have been seen by an outreach worker in Westminster (so you to have a CHAIN record – the database of rough sleepers discussed earlier in this summary document). You must be eligible for benefits.

Local Authorities now tend to 'ring fence' their services, essentially implementing local residency requirements for their services. This seemed to be prompted by a tighter funding environment and areas outside of London reducing their services, prompting more people to come into London accessing services. In previous years, it was not like that.

We serve food here "on a half board basis."

There are 37 ensuite rooms here. Everyone has their own room here.

These are short stays. Average length of stay is 60-65 days. A person once stayed as long as 18 months due to their complex challenges. Sometimes as few as 2 days.

There's currently a 16-person waiting list, meaning a person can't gain entry right away.

Appendix 1: Affordable housing and homelessness in London, England [blog post]

By Nick Falvo, PhD

I recently helped organize a study tour focused on affordable housing and homelessness in London, England. A partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing Canada and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, we toured 10 sites over a five-day period. Our group consisted of 30 participants—mostly Canadians from the non-profit sector and government.

Here are 10 things to know:

- 1. There has been increased awareness and concern in England about the quality of existing social housing units.** This was brought into sharp focus by the tragic fire at Grenfell Tower in 2017, during which 70 people died. Over the past few years, there's also been a social media campaigner who's been very effective at drawing awareness to quality concerns in social housing throughout England.
- 2. Similarly, customer relations with existing social housing tenants is growing as an issue.** Plentific, an Uber-style solution to home repairs and maintenance, may be part of the solution. They connect contractors to units, speeding up work orders. Plentific offers a software platform that allows tenants to see progress on work orders as the work unfolds and also to rate the quality of the work, much as an Uber customer can watch the status of their ride and provide a driver rating.
- 3. New immigrants are being scapegoated.** Many people experiencing visible homelessness in London do not speak English, as very few of them are from the United Kingdom (UK). In fact, about 80% of London's rough sleepers today are not from the UK, and this makes it challenging to get funding support to address it. This is often referred to as "migration homelessness."
- 4. Mixed tenure is very much the new direction for non-profit housing providers.** Poplar HARCA, for example, has acquired housing stock over the years via transfers from what used to be council housing (i.e., public housing). It initially had 80% social housing. Now it's headed towards 50% (but not by reducing total social housing stock – in fact, it is increasing total social housing stock, but not as quickly as other types). One advantage of a mixed model is that it allows for cross subsidy (i.e., rental income from some units help to subsidized rent in other units).
- 5. Joint ventures can help address housing affordability.** Peabody, a not-for-profit housing association, lacks in-house construction expertise; they therefore like to enter joint ventures with private developers such as Mount Anvil. With some of the units created, leases are sold to private homeowners; but Peabody then takes the affordable homes back after construction is complete, at which point the joint venture dissolves. Technically, Peabody buys the affordable units from the joint venture. And on the private units, Peabody gets 50% of the profits on the sale to private homeowners.
- 6. Some of London's non-profit housing providers are massive in size.** L&Q Housing has more than 108,000 units. Of these, 64,000 units are social renting (i.e., very low rent). L&Q has over 4,000 employees, roughly 450 of whom are on the development team. Due largely to its size, L&Q Housing is able to borrow on the bond market, securing lower interest rates than through conventional lending.

7. **Yet, emergency shelters in London tend to be much smaller than those in major North American cities.** Over the years, several large ones were closed down; others were repurposed in order to offer more self-contained apartment-style accommodation (this was accelerated during the COVID pandemic). London tends to not to see more than 100 people in any one emergency shelter.
8. **London has several client-level databases.** In-Form is England's main client-level database system, used by 335 organizations (there are 27,000 licenses, representing 50% of every staff person in England's homelessness sector). CHAIN, intended for rough sleeping, is used by all 35 of London's outreach teams. StreetLink is also for rough sleeping, but features an app allowing members of the general public to 'call in' when they see someone sleeping rough.
9. **Human trafficking is a major issue in London's homelessness sector.** For example, 'aggressive begging' is sometimes organized by gangs, and the passports of some of the panhandlers are sometimes kept in order to hold them ransom. To help address this problem, The Passage has an Anti-Slavery Team, providing support to survivors of modern slavery who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Westminster (central London).
10. **St Mungo's coordinates some innovative prison 'in reach.'** St Mungo's tries to both prevent the eviction of recently-incarcerated inmates and line up housing (and income assistance) for persons about to be released from prison. The organization is now in 10 London Estate prisons. They have about 30 FTE staff working on this; they also subcontract a further 15 positions to a partner agency. Staff focus on the last eight weeks of an inmate's sentence, in part because there is not much point in trying to find a person housing before that.

In sum. This blog post provides an overview of a five-day study tour, organized in partnership with the Chartered Institute of Housing Canada and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association. Our next study tour will take place in Helsinki, Finland, September 22-26, 2025 (to remain in the loop on developments related to that study tour, please reach out to Mel Willerth at MWillerth@chra-achru.ca).

I wish to thank Bob Regnier, Sylvia Regnier and Annick Torfs for assistance with this blog post, which originally appeared at the home page of Nick Falvo Consulting: <https://nickfalvo.ca/>

Appendix 2: List of Participants

Margaret	Pfoh:	AHMA
Petr	Bakus:	Victoria Park Community Services
Jenn	Anderson:	Government of Alberta
Derek	McMaster:	City of Ottawa
Leigh	Bursey:	CHRA Board/Independent
Gord	Johnston:	Civida
Theresa	Kavanaugh:	Board, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
Shaun	Simms:	Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
Juanie	Pudluk:	Nunavut Housing Corporation
Michael	Potvin:	Homes First
Jamie	Facciolo:	Homes First
Keith	Hambly:	Fred Victor
Mark	Aston:	Covenant House
Emmy	Kelly:	Blue Door
Abi	Bond:	City of Toronto
Sylvain	Piché:	OMH Laval
Helen	Cheung:	Houselink and Mainstay Community Housing
Emily	Kellway:	Away Home
Sarah	Collins:	LOFT Community Services
Cliff	Youdale:	Ottawa Community Housing Corporation
Lee	Stevens:	Vibrant Communities Calgary
Juha	Kahila:	Y Foundation
Meherzad	Bakht:	Yardi
Michael	Braithwaite:	Blue Door
Heather	Morley:	Inn from the Cold
Lisa	Ker:	CHTC
Stephan	Richard:	CHTC
Kale	Brown:	City of Ottawa
James	Hughes:	Old Mission Brewery
Stacey	Houston:	CIH Education Committee/Civida
Ray	Sullivan:	CHRA
Julie	McNamara:	CHRA
Mel	Willerth:	CIH Canada
Nick	Falvo:	Nick Falvo Consulting

Appendix 3: Helsinki 2025



 Chartered
Institute of
Housing
Canada

 CHRA ACHRU

 **NICK FALVO**
CONSULTING

Save The Date

INTERNATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STUDY TOUR

Helsinki, Finland
September 22 to 26, 2025

mel@chra-achru.ca