

Migrants'
experiences of
homelessness
in Dublin

Homeless in my new Home



executive summary



Creating
homes
together



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The views expressed in this report are those of the publishers and do not necessarily represent the views of the Research Advisory Group members.

The full 'Homeless in my new Home' report can be downloaded from www.focusireland.ie and www.immigrantcouncil.ie

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Fieldwork managed by	TSA Consultancy
Funded by	Dublin City Council

'I led a different life before to the way my life looks now, and I'm just a bit embarrassed about the way things turned out for me and the place where I am right now, and I lost everything, you know.'

Kacper, Polish man

'It affects me in every way because when people ask me, old people that I used to work with, "Where do you live? What do you do?" What do I tell them? What do I tell them? I feel too ashamed to say anything.'

Monica, African woman

'I consider Ireland now kind of my country; that's why sometimes when things are refused or things do not work out because of my origin it's like it's not fair.'

Francis, African man

Foreword

Many migrants come to Ireland to make a new home for themselves and their families, and this can be a positive experience for both the migrants and Irish communities. The current financial crisis means that many people are now finding it difficult to meet even their most basic needs, such as housing and food, and are living in severe destitution – some migrants are among this vulnerable group. The difficulty for some migrants to return to their country of origin, despite this destitution, is important to understand.

Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI) have jointly commissioned this important piece of research to document the homeless experiences of a small number of EU and non-EU migrants that are sleeping rough and accessing homeless accommodation and day services in Dublin. This study provides an insight into the personal stories and experiences of fifteen migrants experiencing homelessness, and identifies the barriers and blockages they face in accessing services, social welfare payments and accommodation.

The most common reason for coming to Ireland for the migrants interviewed was to look for work. The findings of this report demonstrate the central importance of employment and income – many of those interviewed lost their accommodation and subsequently became homeless due to a lack of work and money.

Although the experiences of these migrants have varied depending on their nationality and legal status, some common patterns emerge. Worryingly, most of the migrants have no source of income or social welfare supports, and have been homeless in Ireland for more than one year. Only one participant had previously experienced homelessness in their country

of origin. This means that their *first* experience of homelessness was in Ireland.

The policy response in many countries, including Ireland, is to encourage migrants to return to their country of origin. This study clearly shows that some migrants have no desire or intention to return to their country of origin, as Ireland has become their home for a variety of reasons.

Appropriate policy responses are urgently needed to address the needs of migrants who are living in destitution and do not wish to leave Ireland. Some migrants are unlikely to become Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) compliant and are not entitled to social welfare payments – they are some of the most vulnerable and marginalised people in our society and must not be ignored.

This report makes a series of recommendations to address the many barriers migrants face in moving on from homelessness. Focus Ireland and the ICI believe that the lessons learned from this study and the stories told by the participants can make a real difference – both to migrants currently experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness in the future.

I would like to thank TSA Consultancy for producing this invaluable research, Dublin City Council for funding the study, the Advisory Group for their ongoing support and guidance, the peer researchers for conducting the interviews, and in particular the migrants whose openness in sharing their experiences has given us a deeper understanding of the changing profile and experiences of homelessness in Dublin today.

Sr Stanislaus Kennedy

Founder and Life President of Focus Ireland

Founder and Board Member of the Immigrant Council of Ireland

I Aim and objectives of study

This small-scale exploratory study has been commissioned by Focus Ireland and the Immigrant Council of Ireland (ICI), and was funded by Dublin City Council.

While a number of studies have been carried out in recent years in Ireland on the growing issue of migrant homelessness, there is limited research into individual subjective experiences. This study profiles a small number of migrants who are sleeping rough or accessing homeless accommodation and day services in Dublin, and documents their homeless experiences using the 'pathways approach' and case studies. The needs of homeless migrants in moving on from homelessness are examined, and the barriers they face in accessing services and adequate/sustainable housing are highlighted. The core research question for this study is:

What are the experiences of homeless migrants in Dublin, and what are the services gaps/limitations that they encounter?

2 Methodology

This qualitative research has been carried out using ethical and participatory research approaches. A variety of methodologies were used, including: a review of Irish literature and policy on migration and homelessness, consultations with statutory and voluntary homeless organisations and information services, in-depth interviews with homeless migrants in Dublin, and the analysis of interviews using 'grounded theory'.

This research sought to explore participants' own experiences and perspectives on their pathways into, through and out of homelessness. Case studies were developed in order to present the biographical stories of each participant on their homeless experiences.

Six peer researchers (i.e. people who shared the same nationality and cultural background as the participants) were recruited to interview the research participants in order to ensure that the participants were interviewed in their own language. The peer researchers were trained in qualitative research

In addressing this core question, the research attempts to:

- 1 Provide greater understanding of the homeless pathways of foreign nationals in order to identify the point at which intervention may assist in the prevention of homelessness.
- 2 Provide a profile of foreign nationals who are 'falling through' the range of emergency supports and services available in Dublin.
- 3 Develop an understanding of the various legal, structural and policy barriers that migrants face in moving on from homelessness in order to contribute to the Government's target of ending long-term homelessness and the need to sleep rough.
- 4 Provide an evidence base for Focus Ireland and the ICI's strategies, actions and interventions in order to assist foreign nationals who are experiencing homelessness.
- 5 Identify appropriate policy and service delivery interventions to respond to the needs of foreign nationals who are experiencing homelessness.

methods, interview skills, research ethics, homelessness in Ireland, and residency and legal status in Ireland.

Contact was made with twenty-one homeless and migrant organisations in Dublin as part of the recruitment process. In total, seventeen homeless people were interviewed, of which fifteen met the eligibility criteria of the research (i.e. from the selected nationalities, and sleeping rough or accessing homeless day/accommodation services). The countries of origin of the fifteen interviewees were: Poland (9 interviewees), Latvia (2), UK (1), Nigeria (1), Ivory Coast (1), and South Africa (1).

A research advisory group was established to advise on and oversee the research process. Members of this advisory group included: the two commissioning organisations, Dublin City Council, TSA Consultancy (who managed and completed the fieldwork for this study), the Dublin Region Homeless Executive, and representatives from various homeless service providers.

3 Limitations of study

This research is a small-scale qualitative study with a small number of research participants. While those interviewed may comprise a relatively significant proportion of homeless migrants in Dublin, the small participant numbers limit their capacity to be representative of the homeless migrant population.

Notwithstanding this limitation, the findings of this study provide an insight into the personal experiences and pathways of the homeless migrants interviewed, as well as the various barriers/blockages that they have experienced in accessing services, social welfare payments and accommodation.

4 Migration and homelessness

Although Irish demographic and migration trends are not exceptional in the EU, they do differ from the typical experience of other EU countries. In the context of this research, the most significant difference is the relatively high percentage of the total Irish population that is of foreign origin (of which most are nationals from other EU member states).

The focus of immigration policy in Ireland in the last decade has been on the asylum and work permit systems. In 2004 the Government decided to introduce a form of regulation of EU immigration through a requirement that migrants demonstrate that they are 'habitually resident' in Ireland before they can access welfare services. There are five factors that determine whether a person is 'habitually resident' in Ireland:

- 1 Length and continuity of residence in Ireland or in any other particular country
- 2 Length and purpose of any absence from Ireland
- 3 Nature and pattern of employment
- 4 Applicant's main centre of interest
- 5 Future intentions of applicant

An additional provision, the 'right to reside' test, was introduced in 2009 – a person must have a 'right to reside' before it can be determined if they are habitually resident. The 'right to reside' clause and habitual residency are significant issues facing migrants who find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness when they seek to access social welfare payments. The application of these rules is affected by the routes through which foreign nationals enter the State (e.g. as an undocumented migrant, asylum seeker, non-EU national with permission to remain etc.).

The residency situation and experiences of foreign nationals may have a significant impact on their reasons for entering homelessness and the prospects for exiting homelessness. A number of recent research studies in Ireland have evidenced the risk of homelessness for migrants, including *Away from home and homeless* (2006), *EU10 people using homeless services: Who are they?* (2008) and *Making a Home in Ireland* (2009).

The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (formerly the Homeless Agency) has conducted a number of surveys and counts in Dublin to enumerate the number of people sleeping rough and accessing homeless accommodation, day and information/advice services. The Rough Sleepers Count has measured substantive changes in the composition of those sleeping rough in Dublin, with an established foreign national population observed rough sleeping since November 2008. The total number of people sleeping rough in Dublin has fallen in recent years; however, both the proportion and actual number of foreign nationals sleeping rough has increased. Furthermore, *Counted In 2008* demonstrated a significant increase in the number of people of foreign nationality accessing homeless services in Dublin – 16% of all users (10% surveyed were EU citizens and 6% were non-EU citizens).

Despite the risk of destitution, poverty and homelessness in Ireland, many migrants are reluctant to return to their country of origin. The personal, economic and political circumstances in a migrant's country of origin must be considered when understanding why they choose not to return.

5 Findings of study

The main findings from the qualitative interviews with the research participants are summarised below:

Accommodation

Eleven interviewees were staying in emergency accommodation, and in most cases this was accessed through the night bus (which is now decommissioned). However, some people were staying in emergency accommodation provided directly through the New Communities Unit.

The remaining four interviewees were sleeping rough. Seven of those interviewed had previously slept rough, and a further three reported living in squats at various different times throughout their experience of homelessness.

Reasons for coming to Ireland

The most common reason given by participants for coming to Ireland was to look for work. Other reasons included: to seek asylum and flee political persecution, to be reunited with partners/family living in Ireland, and to start a new life (for example, following a bereavement or relationship breakdown in their own country).

Work experience in Ireland

All of the interviewees were unemployed at the time of interview, and eleven had previously worked in Ireland. Five participants had worked in jobs which were casual and paid 'cash in hand', and so they did not have any PRSI contributions in Ireland.

Source of income

One of the key barriers noted by those interviewed was the lack of income to support any form of accommodation. Four interviewees have secured social welfare payments but the remaining eleven receive no income. Their lack of income was a result of not having access to employment or any social welfare payments. These participants relied on support from family members/friends, occasional begging, and casual work.

Reasons for homelessness

The most frequent reason stated by interviewees for experiencing homelessness was a lack of work and money, leading to the loss of their accommodation

(six interviewees). There were many different reasons identified for loss of employment. In most cases interviewees did not experience much difficulty in gaining employment, but as the economic downturn took effect in Ireland the sectors in which people were employed were particularly affected (e.g. construction).

The second most frequent reason cited was being asked to leave accommodation (either because of a lack of money, a breakdown in relationships, or due to alcohol/drug use).

Length of time homeless

Homelessness was a new experience for the majority of those interviewed; only two interviewees had prior experiences of homelessness in their country of origin. The majority of those interviewed have been homeless on a long-term basis: four interviewees have been homeless for less than one year; the remaining eleven interviewees have been homeless for more than one year. No participants have been homeless for more than four years.

Most of the interviewees had been living in Ireland for at least one year before they became homeless.

Access to welfare supports

In most cases, once the interviewees became homeless, they remained homeless and did not report any periods where they moved out of homelessness. A key factor in the interviewees' experience of homelessness was whether they could access social and community welfare payments.

Only a minority of those interviewed were in receipt of social welfare or supplementary welfare payments at the time of interview. Four interviewees were in receipt of jobseeker's allowance, and a further four had previously been in receipt of social welfare payments.

Some of those who had no income at the time of interview had previously accessed payments in the past for short periods of time (until they were told that they were no longer eligible). These were mainly jobseeker's benefit payments.

Five interviewees have either not applied or pursued applications, as they feel that they will not be eligible for payment (e.g. if they have not worked in Ireland) or that they cannot meet the requirements.

Services accessed

The predominant services that were accessed by those interviewed were: food and day services for homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, emergency accommodation (through the night bus) and social welfare services. In the absence of any source of income, most of those interviewed relied significantly on homeless day services (which provided them with food, information, and shower/laundry facilities).

Access to rent allowance

Even in cases where interviewees had an entitlement to social welfare payments on the basis of their being habitually resident, there was a problem for some in accessing private sector rent allowance (supplementary welfare allowance) as they did not meet eligibility requirements. Three interviewees identified this as the reason for them becoming homeless.

Social networks and supports

The lack of a strong social network was identified by some interviewees as being a factor in becoming homeless.

The experience of homelessness for the research participants was compounded by weak social networks and supports. Most interviewees did not have a wide social circle or family to support them when they lost their accommodation or became homeless. In addition, the stigma and embarrassment of homelessness has led some participants to withdraw from contacts and

networks that could support them, both in Ireland and their country of origin.

Language issues

Two interviewees reported language issues as being a direct cause of their homelessness, and many participants experienced difficulties in accessing services and payments due to language issues.

Coping mechanisms and alcohol/drug use

While alcohol was an identified factor in causing homelessness in some instances, most interviewees stated that alcohol/drug use was an effect of or coping mechanism for their experience of homelessness.

Training and education

Some interviewees were accessing or trying to access training and education services (mainly related to English language training), and a number of interviewees had either completed or were awaiting English language training. Just as language was a factor for some in becoming homeless, it was also identified as a factor by interviewees in moving out of homelessness.

Returning to country of origin

Returning to their country of origin was not regarded as a pathway out of homelessness for the majority of those interviewed. Only three interviewees stated that they may consider returning to their country of origin at some point in the future.

6 Discussion and conclusions

This research presents patterns and themes that have emerged in the experiences of those interviewed, many of which have been identified in previous exploratory research undertaken on migrant homelessness, which indicates that these are not isolated experiences.

The majority of those interviewed were long-term homeless, and of those who were long-term homeless for more than one year (eleven interviewees), nine were in receipt of no income and had not had income for the duration of their homelessness.

Only three interviewees expressed any intention of returning to their country of origin in the short or medium-term. Most felt that they could not return home, or for a variety of reasons had no home in their country of origin.

The majority of those interviewed viewed their potential pathways out of homelessness to be linked to employment and accommodation, just as their pathways into homelessness were predominantly linked to these issues. However, barriers exist in relation to these pathways out of homelessness.

A number of changes in homeless policy and service provision have occurred in Dublin during the completion of this research. The Charlemont Street emergency accommodation service, which allows homeless migrants to access accommodation on an ongoing basis without having to register with the free-phone service each night, addresses on a temporary basis some of the issues that were identified by those interviewed in this study.

Furthermore, there has been a recent shift in policy by the Dublin Region Homeless Executive away from one-night accommodation for people accessing emergency accommodation through the free-phone. Although persons who are experiencing homelessness and accessing emergency accommodation through the free-phone number will now be placed in

temporary accommodation for an initial period of up to seven days, those who are *not* compliant with the HRC will only be provided with emergency accommodation on a one-night basis (and *may* be provided with temporary accommodation for up to seven nights).

The findings of this study highlight that access to income and long-term accommodation is a need that exists but remains largely unaddressed for homeless migrants. The degree of social exclusion that people face due to their limited eligibility for services, lack of social networks and isolation, lack of access to training and education, lack of English language skills, and lack of general familiarity with the system of social welfare compounds their experiences of homelessness and moving on from homelessness.

7 Recommendations

Many of the issues and themes identified by the research participants and presented in this study are consistent with previous research findings, such as *Away from home and homeless* (2009) and *Making a Home in Ireland* (2009).

Due to the small number of homeless migrants that were interviewed for this study, it is acknowledged that the findings are not representative of all homeless migrants in Dublin. Notwithstanding this limitation, the findings do provide an insight into the personal experiences and pathways of the fifteen individuals interviewed, as well as the various barriers and blockages that they have experienced in accessing services, social welfare payments and accommodation.

Fifteen recommendations have been developed from this research, based on the findings of this study, previous research conducted on migrant homelessness, and the experiences of homeless organisations that provide services to migrants. A monitoring and review group should be established to ensure that the recommendations adopted from this study are implemented.

Application of the Habitual Residence Condition

- 1 It is evident that a limited number of migrants currently residing in homeless accommodation are unlikely to become HRC compliant under current criteria and are not entitled to social welfare payments. Consideration should be given to appropriate policy responses to resolve this issue, including a supported programme of reconnection and reintegration to countries of origin. A considerable number of migrants who are not HRC compliant have an attachment to Ireland and have no desire to return to their country of origin. The Cross-Departmental Team on Homelessness, in consultation with homeless organisations, should develop appropriate policy responses to address these people's needs if they choose not to return to their country of origin and are living in destitution in Ireland.

- 2 There should be a more consistent approach across social welfare offices towards the interpretation and implementation of the HRC and the provision of information to homeless migrants.
- 3 Homeless organisations should compile case studies of their service-users' HRC and welfare application and appeal decisions in order to monitor consistency and quality of applications, appeals and decisions.
- 4 HRC decisions from the social welfare appeals office should be published to ensure that applicants can identify criteria they must meet and to ensure transparency, consistency and confidence in the process.

Emergency accommodation and advocacy/information services

- 5 In the case where an appeal for residency status is pending, homeless migrants should, at a minimum, continue to have access to temporary emergency accommodation.
- 6 In line with the Government's homeless strategy *The Way Home*, access to support for those living in emergency accommodation outside of Dublin city centre should be reviewed and monitored. This research indicates that those staying in emergency accommodation in the suburbs may not have access to a range of information and other family supports that are available in the city centre.
- 7 All homeless services should be able to provide a basic level of independent advocacy and information support to homeless migrants in their applications for social welfare and supplementary welfare allowance payments. An advice and advocacy support resource/expert with in-depth legal and social welfare knowledge should be available to advocates in homeless services.

Training for staff and migrants

- 8 All front-line and supervisory staff should receive inter-cultural and diversity training. This should be part of ongoing professional development. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive should manage the delivery of this training. State agencies and homeless organisations should undertake a whole organisation approach to inter-culturalism¹.
- 9 Consideration should be given to the delivery of briefing/information sessions, specifically on the needs and entitlements of homeless migrants, on a joint basis by voluntary homeless services and the New Communities Unit. These briefing sessions could be provided to staff in social welfare offices outside of Dublin city to ensure that the expertise gained by examining the circumstances of homeless migrants in the city centre is shared and disseminated. This should be resourced by the Department of Social Protection.
- 10 The language needs of homeless migrants should be an integral part of their support plan. Access to English language and general training could be enhanced by greater co-ordination between State and community training services (e.g. Local Employment Services) and homeless service providers. Referral, assessment and access protocols should be developed to enable easier access to a wider range of training programmes for homeless migrants.
- 11 Homeless migrants need access to labour market opportunities. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive's Training, Education and Employment (TEE) Network should ensure that TEE initiatives are accessible to migrants who may have limited English language skills.

¹ National Consultative Committee on Racism and Inter-culturalism '*Guidelines for developing a whole organisation approach to address racism and support inter-culturalism*'.

Monitoring and review

- 12** Representatives from homeless organisations working with migrants; the four Dublin local authorities; Dublin Region Homeless Executive; Department of Environment, Community and Local Government; and the Department of Social Protection should liaise on a formal basis to discuss the issues facing homeless migrants regarding their accommodation, social welfare entitlements and access to services, and lobby for and implement change accordingly.
- 13** Homeless service providers should be aware of the needs of homeless migrants, and adapt and develop their services to meet their changing needs.
- 14** The Dublin Region Homeless Executive should convene a group to monitor the scale and needs of homeless migrants in Dublin. This group should develop an implementation plan that is outcomes-based and accountable in order to meet the identified needs of homeless migrants.

Further research

- 15** Consideration should be given to further research with a wider cohort of migrants, including those at risk of homelessness, those currently homeless and those who have moved out of homelessness, to capture a broader range of experiences and to assist in identifying further interventions to establish pathways out of homelessness. Comparative analysis with interventions undertaken across other jurisdictions, e.g. other EU countries, would also add to the body of knowledge on this issue and help to inform practice in Ireland.

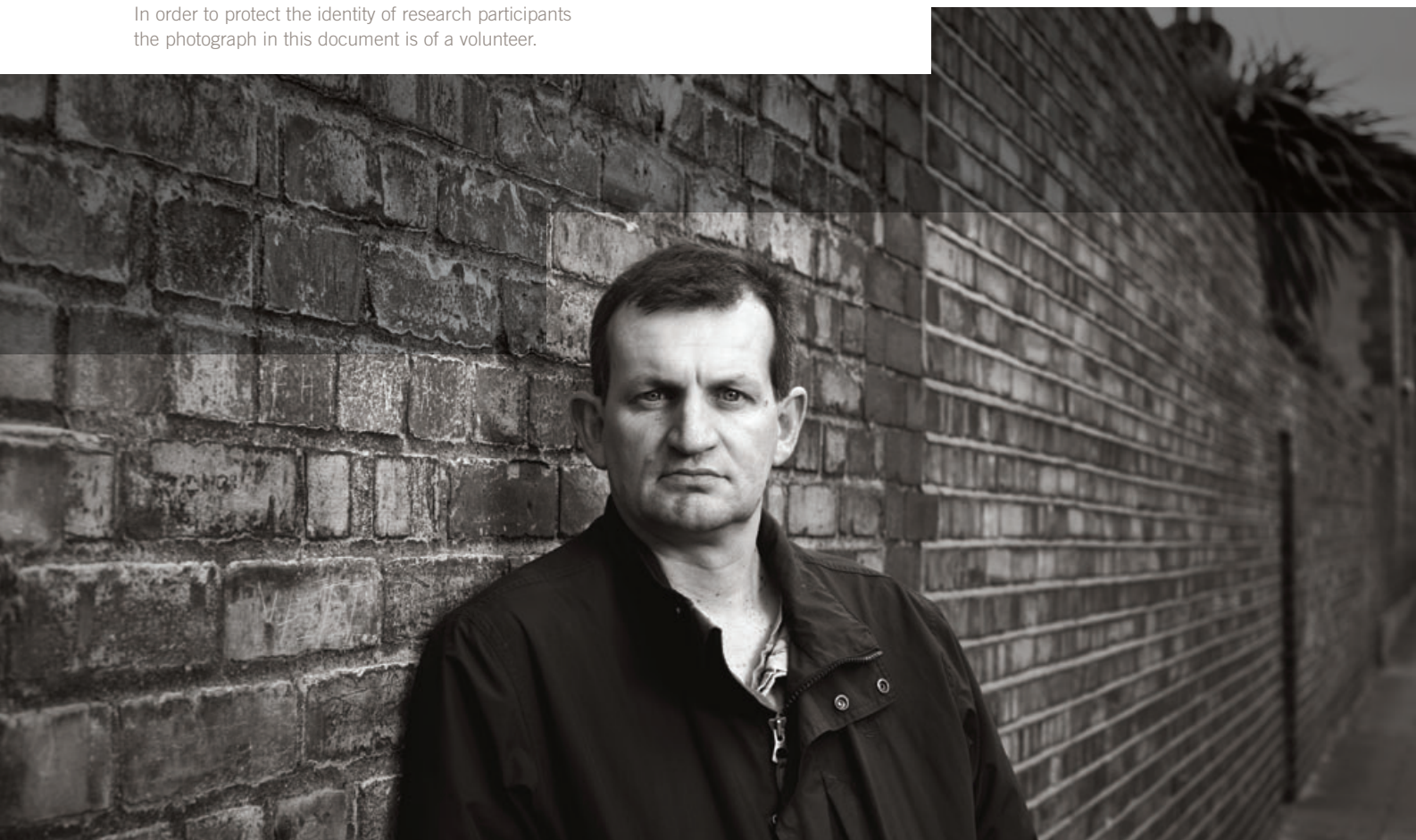
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In order to protect the identity of research participants
the photograph in this document is of a volunteer.



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