



**ACTIVIST INTERVENTIONS AROUND
HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

Other Voices 02

INTRODUCTION

Since our foundation as a law centre, PILC has taken legal action and done rights education in solidarity with grassroots activists struggling for housing, racial and migrant justice. This second publication in our **Other Voices** series highlights the work of three groups we've worked closely with over the past few years.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, we talked over Zoom with friends from **Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth (HASL)**, the **Museum of Homelessness (MoH)** and **Streets Kitchen**.

We asked them to tell us how they started doing what they do, what drives them to carry on doing it, and where they locate hope for the future in an era of multiplying crises and generalised pessimism about the possibility of a better world.

HASL is a housing action group made up of families and individuals who are homeless, living in overcrowded housing or facing other housing problems.

HASL members run the group together with everyone's support and involvement. They work on their housing cases collectively and campaign together for homelessness rights, an end to overcrowded housing, and for the high-quality, safe, secure council homes that we all need and deserve. They do this using a variety of tactics including practical help, legal challenges and direct action. PILC has worked with HASL to bring legal challenges around overcrowding and the 'gatekeeping' of access to secure tenancies.

Museum of Homelessness (MoH) is a museum and collective created and run by people with direct experience of homelessness. Since 2015 they have been building a national museum collection for homelessness, taking direct practical action around the issues faced by their members, and fighting injustice through independent research, campaigning and education.

MoH works closely with Streets Kitchen, a grassroots initiative providing food and support to people experiencing homelessness across London. During Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, PILC worked with MoH and Streets Kitchen to defend the rights of EU citizens who sleep rough, including through street-based legal outreach.

We feel a deep affinity with these three groups (and the other grassroots housing groups we work with, such as Focus E15)—in part because they refuse the 'pragmatic' logic and myopia with respect to structures that dominate the mainstream housing and homelessness sectors. The depth of their commitment to change is matched by the acuity of their analysis of contemporary conditions.

We hope the interviews presented below will inspire others to take collective action around housing, homelessness and migrant destitution—and to ground that work in solidarity not charity.



HOMES NOT BORDERS

Contributors

Jon Glackin is the founder of Streets Kitchen.

Fowsiyo, Izzy, Pamela, Ruby and Ximena are members of Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth (HASL)

Jess Turtle and Matt Turtle founded the Museum of Homelessness (MoH) in 2015.

Interviews, editing and introduction by Benjamin Morgan

Illustration and Design: Aurelia Lange



ORIGIN STORIES

How did your group get started?

Jess Turtle: It was halfway through Tory rule, and austerity. A lot of groups were springing up in the mid-2010s—*Outside Project*, *African Rainbow Family*...

Matt Turtle: MoH was literally a response to the fact that there wasn't a museum of homelessness. Jess was a trustee of the *Simon Community* and the widow of the founder [Anton Wallich-Clifford] had their archive in her attic. All this paperwork and photographs, just sitting there. We thought: someone needs to do something with this stuff.

But the political context is inevitably a big part of our origin story as well. I remember thinking as we were setting it up, homelessness is just rising and rising and rising...

JT: Our first show was called *State of the Nation*. ***We're community led and the community was really fucking angry, and that's made MoH much shoutier and keen to carry out direct action than we might have been in different times...***

Jon Glackin: *Streets Kitchen* started when Greece was having its turmoil, around the economic crisis over there. Their whole country just went to shit, and we were thinking: 'That's what we're facing, no doubt about it.' One of our crew had been out there filming interviews with people, and [we saw] this woman on the screen standing in the middle of a big community centre and behind her they're all having a big dinner. She was talking about their project, and the interviewer started saying it was charity and the woman stops her, and goes: 'No, this isn't charity, it's solidarity.'

I'd heard the phrase before but I had never seen it at work. The point was they were feeding everyone, it didn't matter if you were homeless or not, which is the perfect scenario. So I looked at Islington, where we were, and I thought: 'I'm going to take all their community centres and do that.'

The first Streets Kitchen was around Victoria, round the parks. Just a load of us walking round. We met by the train station, about 20 people turned up and it was great. Then we set one up in Camden, then Hackney...

I'm telling you, lads. we're facing harsh times, and the only way is community dinners...

Izzy HASL: HASL's going to be eight years old in April [2020]. It was started by some of us who used to be involved in welfare campaigning, including a group called Boycott Workfare. We were campaigning against a policy which involved the government telling people that in order to get their basic benefits they had to work, and we used to get a lot of people contacting the group. People would say: 'I know my rights but I can't enforce them. When I go to the job centre, and it's just me and the staff, they don't care about my rights.'

Around that time the government were introducing lots of welfare cuts, especially around housing benefit, and this was leading to lots of evictions. So we knew that housing was becoming a major issue. Some of us grew up in social housing ourselves and knew the importance of it.

We were meeting families whose kids were going from school to school to school because they were going from home to home to home, because of their unstable housing. So we set up HASL with the idea of having a group where we could support each other to enforce our housing rights.

At the very start we used a brilliant pamphlet by the London Coalition Against Poverty as our guide. We were also inspired by stories we had heard about Hackney Housing Action Group marching together on the housing office.

It was clear that just 'having rights' wasn't enough—we wanted to have a group so we could go to the housing office together to ensure they were upheld. But we also wanted to campaign together for more rights because what we have isn't good enough. We want everyone to have good high quality council housing.



Gradually the group grew. We met Fowsiyo and Ximena and Ruby and Pamela. The group wouldn't be running without these guys, it would be impossible. We used to meet in a place called Papa's Cafe and there'd be maybe 10 people in the room. But before Covid we had over 100 people coming to our meetings. It's just grown over the years through the dedication and commitment of people coming.

Do you remember when you first came, Fowsiyo?

Fowsiyo: When I joined I'd been evicted four times from four different properties through no fault of my own. One one occasion the landlord had doubled my rent from £300 to £600 after a year. Or the estate agent would come and say, oh there's a renewal fee of £300, or £450—which I couldn't afford. Or the landlord would want to sell the property. In my last place the ceiling of my toilet has fallen in and the landlord wouldn't fix it. He said: 'If I was renting to students they'd be better. They wouldn't complain.'

So after four evictions I asked Southwark council for help. I sent them all my evidence and documents but nothing was happening. So I contacted Shelter, I went to the Citizen's Advice Bureau... They told me just to go to the council and book myself an appointment for homelessness.

But when I went to Southwark, they wouldn't book me an appointment. They said I should blame myself that I had nowhere suitable to live. I remember the receptionist saying: 'You're an educated woman, you went to university, and you can't provide a roof above your head for your children? We should be calling social services.' That's what she said.

So I started Googling: why would the council turn you away when you had nowhere suitable to live? Four evictions and none of them your fault. I was paying my rent. Being a good tenant. No ASB, nothing at all. So why would they do that?

The first thing that came up from the Google search was HASL. So I went along to Papa John's Cafe, and the first thing I heard was that that everyone was going through the same kind of housing issue, and people were helping each other! No-one was getting paid. They said, if you join, we'll get to know your case, and you might help us as well. So now I help with translation from Somali and Arabic...



CIVIC CENTRE



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TOO LONG IN TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

6 years in temporary accommodation
5 different temporary accommodations
Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

I have lived in 5 different temporary accommodation

Too long in temporary! social housing

Too Long In Temporary!
Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

Too Long In Temporary!
Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

Temporary accommodation makes us sick!
Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

Temporary accommodation makes us sick!
Housing Action Southwark and Lambeth

Central London Stockwell A23

FIGHTING TOGETHER

Tell me something about how the group works?

Ximena HASL: We meet twice a month—once on a Thursday and once on a Saturday. There’s a general session for the whole group at the beginning, then we divide into groups by borough: Southwark or Lambeth. In each group there’s a translator. Then people start discussing their problems, and we try to make some notes about each case. At the end there’s a smaller meeting of more active people, who collate all the notes and try to think through the next steps for each case.

Izzy HASL: Meetings are two hours long, in this hot sweaty hall, and then afterwards people stay behind to make sure we have the right information and action points for each case. It’s quite exhausting! Everybody’s translating into different languages. But at the same time that’s how we’re building our knowledge and collective memory.

Maybe the word ‘meeting’ doesn’t quite do it justice. As well as collectively supporting each other and giving practical help, we also run kids’ activities, and there’s food, and celebrations...

We don’t say mutual aid or solidarity so much in meetings. We use other terms, like: ‘we help each other’, or ‘we fight together’...

Jess Turtle: I grew up in a homeless community which my dad started with my mum. I’m not saying our community was perfect—there was a lot that was quite traumatic about that upbringing—but there were things that were inspiring and that worked.

The idea behind it was that you can have people who are homeless and people who haven’t got a background of homelessness working and living together to create a reality, a way of being, that’s better than the rest of society.

That community ran really successfully for sixteen years. Now it’s the biggest homelessness charity in Wales and it doesn’t really have anything to do with its roots.

Having lived through that as a child and a young adult, I’ve seen that it’s possible for people to come together in that way. So the idea of a community for people in poverty was the driving force for setting up the Museum of Homelessness. We’d like it if people could learn from the historical story that the museum’s telling, but we also want to help create those spaces, enact those relationships and work for something better.

We don’t use the word community lightly, so when we find allies that are doing something similar—Streets Kitchen, *Outside Project*, the *Simon Community* have still got it—we grab onto those people!

Izzy HASL: Commitment is a really important word. The main organisers in HASL have so much going on: Fowsiyo’s home schooling, Ximena’s studying, most people have kids... But I know that if I’m doing a meeting they’ll be there.

We encourage people to work on their own housing problem because they know their case best of all. But the rest of the group will support them, help them to find a lawyer. At the end of the day the group is more invested in people’s cases than a lawyer would ever be.

Plus, there's so much knowledge in the group—we've been supporting each other for so many years that our collective knowledge of housing rights might be better than some lawyers in some areas. People in the group can calculate statutory overcrowding, they can explain Lambeth's housing allocation policy. The knowledge is so strong...

Ximena HASL: And it works...Most of our members came to HASL when they were really desperate, with nowhere to go. The council has told them it's their fault: 'You caused your bad housing conditions, we'll call social services about your children.' They're truly desperate and they don't know where to go, they've been to CAB, everywhere, and they can't afford to pay privately for advice. Then when they come to HASL things happen for them. The council responds to them, maybe they get moved to new temporary accommodation. So people tell their families, their friends and neighbours, and those people end up joining HASL as well.

Jess Turtle: The museum thing is a stealth vehicle. People think: 'Oh, it's a museum. Let's work with this museum.' I remember we did a show at Tate Liverpool and we invited the squatters in—it was the Manchester squatters, Establish Beyond, and the night before we were due to run the squatting workshop with them they ran a piece in the Meteor saying they were going to take Liverpool by storm. They were only being satirical but Tate Liverpool freaked out. We had to do a lot of stroking, we told them: 'It's alright, you're not going to have Occupy Tate...'

So with the name ['museum'] we can get into places and then do things like that. It means you can open the door, take allies with you, and be challenging in those spaces, be disruptive. It might be wearing off now, though, coz we're getting more of a name as campaigners...

JG: Streets Kitchen...We had to call it something and do something. Everyone's got crews and is doing something, you have to call it something... ***I hate the word 'soup kitchen', it's a Victorian thing and half the time you don't even get fucking soup...***

'Streets Kitchen' was supposed to make it fun, make it a bit nuts. The idea was 'don't ask permission: just do it'. Coz Westminster [council] were trying to stop the soup runs, so we were in there terrorising... Plus we were squatting then. We were taking all of these Central London squats. That's where I was living, where we were operating out of at the start, and it grew from there.

It's run through an autonomous collective-decision making process and it's all inclusive, you cross all sections of the homeless community. Well, the poverty community, coz everybody needs to eat...

Ruby HASL: We're like a unit. When we organise protests, or when we're supporting people whose first language isn't English, we make sure we have interpreters there so people feel confident about asking questions and understanding their case. We fight for our rights together, whether it's building a campaign, or doing social media, or writing letters to the council. As a group we have more power than we do as individuals...

Ximena HASL: We are like a family, we know each other, we know each other's cases, we share knowledge, there is lots of repetition across people's cases. We share experiences for emotional support. That's really important...

Izzy HASL: *We know each other's children, relatives. We share the events that happen in our lives—people have babies, children go off to university—as well as all the difficulties we face with housing and the way they relate to issues like immigration, benefits, and domestic violence. We go through these things together...*

We've known each other for years, and that means we've seen people get council housing, we've seen how it's transformed their lives. That gives us the determination to carry on fighting.



What brings people to your group?

Fowsiyo: We have British Somalis, Somalis with Swiss, Danish, Finnish or Dutch passports. We have Eritreans and Ethiopians with British or German passports, we have Algerians...

Ximena: And lots of Latin Americans... We have people from all backgrounds, different countries, speakers of different languages. It's a multicultural space, we learn from them and they learn from us... In my case I help with Spanish translation. But people also need social support and sometimes psychological support, because how they are living affects them psychologically.

Izzy: Most people have an immediate housing problem: either they're in TA or severely overcrowded private-rented sector accommodation. ***We don't turn anyone away.***

Recently people have started coming from other boroughs [beyond Lambeth and Southwark]. We'll say: 'We don't have as much experience of that borough because allocations policies differ, but you're welcome to sit and listen. If you want to be involved you're still welcome.' As well as our Southwark and Lambeth groups, we have a good Lewisham group run by a HASL member. She and her son joined our group years ago, and they have stayed with us, as well as helping Lewisham families...

Why do people come to HASL? For some people there's no other option in terms of housing support. They can't go to the CAB because they don't speak English, they can't call up statutory services or Shelter. But a friend will say to them: 'Oh, you've got a housing problem, you need to go to HASL.'



BEING DIFFERENT

How are you different from a charity or a legal advice service?

Jess Turtle: MoH is really influenced by the Simon Community. They have live-in volunteers who spend six months living together with homeless people. It's a very intense experience and during the first couple of meetings someone will always ask them 'what are you here for?' ***If someone says 'because I want to help people or save people' community members will tell them you're probably in the wrong place, because this work isn't about your need to rescue people and the reality is that you're not going to be able to fix this. There's a lot of trauma involved in the work, and a massive sadness.***

Sometimes volunteers think they're going to fix problems out on the street, but for systemic reasons it's just not possible.

Matt Turtle: When you're trying to solve people's problems you're activating an unequal power dynamic, you are assuming you're in a position to make an assessment of what

people's needs are. You wouldn't do that with somebody you've just met so you can't really do it on the streets!

Pamela HASL: I think the great value of our group is that we share our experiences, and this means we understand really well how the different systems of the council—the housing office, for example—work. We know our rights and how to fight for them. ***Solidarity and empathy are words that come to mind. When you go to the CAB you are just a number.***

They don't have the time to go through the council's housing allocations policy. So you go home, and you don't feel like you've been helped. They just say: 'Keep bidding'. But I'm already bidding! In Southwark you can bid for a hundred years and you will not go anywhere unless you have the stars.¹

At places like the CAB you can't come back twice a month and see the same person. You get 15 mins max with the adviser, that's it. The time you book you see a different adviser. At HASL people know your face, your family, your children...

Izzy HASL: A real strength of the group is that we put people's problems together. We'll be talking about one person's case and someone will say: 'Oh, these people had a similar problem.' So by listening to each other's individual problems we build up a sense of common issues and root causes, and we build campaigns around that. A while ago we had lots of families in TA outside of Southwark. So we held a protest saying: 'We need a home close to school'—because a lot of the families had that problem.

¹ As Izzy explains: 'Each local council has its own housing waiting list rules. In Southwark, as well as having different bands (band 1-4 with band 1 being the highest priority/top of the housing waiting list and band 4 being those with no housing need/bottom of the housing waiting list) there is also an infantilising 'priority stars' system, through which stars are awarded to differentiate between applicants within a band. So there's a star for being a 'working household' and a star for 'volunteering'. I'm not a fan at all of the star system—you can see how it can discriminate against those who are not in paid work. It's also a bit of a distraction as it leads people to desperately try to collect as many priority stars as they can. The real issue is that we need enough high-quality council homes so that these stars do not need to exist at all!'

Ximena HASL: *It's about teamwork. It's not just 'OK, give me the information then I will do everything.' It's about working together on someone's case.*

Izzy HASL: We try to make sure people are involved in their case. We say: 'Come to a meeting, we'll support you to take action. But you need to be involved because you know your case better than anyone, better than a lawyer.'

Often when you go to a lawyer they talk down to you and think they know everything. In HASL we say: 'You know a lot, but you need support. Nobody can do this alone because the system makes everything so difficult. So you'll use your knowledge, but we'll share ours and support you to go forward.'

Fowsiyo HASL: We had one family who were homeless and the woman was living with her mum. Her mum had damp issues so we told her how to complain to the council. Then she said: 'my grandma has benefits issues'. So we sent her somewhere to get advice about that. In the meantime we've helped her carry on bidding [for social housing]. So we've supported the whole family. One person, one appointment, one problem—it doesn't work like that.

Izzy HASL: Sometimes I've been to a lawyer to accompany people and they've been rude to both of us. I want to say: 'This person's got a housing problem and you're treating them like they're below you.' There are good lawyers out there, though—ones who treat people as equals, and acknowledge the difficulties people are going through and the knowledge they have about their own case. We've made relationships with them so we can refer to them.

I'm not just saying this, but *Helen Mowatt* (from PILC) is my favourite lawyer in the world because she treats everyone in the group with so much respect and care. And we can talk to her about how to run campaigns alongside the legal challenges. She's always super supportive and up for being involved.

Ximena HASL: Even if people have the option to go to a solicitors and lawyers, often HASL knows more than a lawyer about how to get an answer from the council.

Jess Turtle: *You have to meet people on their own terms, not the terms that fulfil some sort of need that exists in you.* We don't keep data on people that we're working with. There are really good reasons for that, and we have to do a lot of work explaining the whole history of it, how the use of people's information has been a real problem in the homelessness sector in the past.

Matt Turtle: There's also a difference in terms of what people want from you and what we want from them. We're not trying to get people to change, or do something they should do. They're getting something different from us—something more mutual that what you get in a more service-led charitable culture.

Jess Turtle: We've been working with our core group to develop a half-day session that will hopefully help people understand who we are and how we work, and what we are on the streets for—the culture and practice of MoH. Street solidarity is very different from, say, working for a commissioned outreach service or volunteering in a normal soup kitchen. What we do is quite odd and it can be a culture shock for some people.

So it will sort of be an induction but it's also a philosophical reflection on how can you be with people who are on the street without immediately being able to, or even trying to, fix people's problems, and without having referral rights [into a hostel]. What use can we be, what can we offer, what are the relationships like and what kind of boundaries do we need to evolve? It's a really interesting set of questions, we haven't got all the answers but we've been working it out together as a group.

Matt Turtle: Homelessness charities, especially the big ones, often aren't doing this sort of thinking. They pride themselves on being 'doers not thinkers' and it's true they are doers, but the things they're doing are often mutually contradictory. The data row in the *Gureckis case* is a prime example. These are organisations that are arms of the state while purporting not to be arms of the state. They're sharing data that's been given to them on a trust basis. They are doing things that don't match up because bureaucratization has moved them away from their original purpose.

There's an interesting piece of history that sums up when things changed. It's a quote from Mick Carroll, who was quite influential in St. Mungo's in the 1980s, where he's reflecting on the work they had managed to do. He says: 'These men were living in a community paying rent'—that's in italics—'which gave them the right to complain about their food or ask for a better bed [...] The care that was provided was never patronising, it was neither seductive nor exploitative nor manipulative and that ethos developed further later on. We totally debunked the salvation idea. We weren't trying to save anyone.'²

I've always been really fascinated by that. They had achieved something, they had done something completely new. They did have time to think and reflect on what homelessness meant and how they could do something about it. I feel like that kind of thing—the [original] idea of homelessness work anchored in rights and things being equitable has been totally changed over the years. Provision has become increasingly conditional and restricted.

Jess Turtle: *It's something we think about a lot: how do the radical organisations of their time end up becoming these huge arms of the state? Will Streets Kitchen and Museum of Homelessness be like that in 40 years?*

² Homeless But for St Mungos, George Tremlett. Harper Collins: 1989.



Is it inevitable or can you sustain doing things outside of the norm? We hope we can, and that's partly why we want to learn these lessons from history.

Part of it's the growth model, which is what's inherently wrong with all of capitalism: this idea that you have to get bigger and better, you have to scale your product. Why? Look where that got St Mungo's. The homelessness sector has become transactional and over-professionalised, with rigid boundaries. At best this means it's doing a disservice to homeless people—and at worst it's killing people.

Matt Turtle: What we're doing is a reaction to a pervasive culture, which has also become a pervasive language: 'Single service offers'—so you can say they turned down the offer— or '*social impact bonds*'—if an individual does this or that then private investors pay you for it. '*Intentionality...*'

Jess Turtle: There's no room for sentimentality in homelessness. People do relapse, people do fall out, it's tough. The thing is to create a dynamic where all that stuff can be unpacked and looked after safely, and people can be accepted as they are without trying to change them into someone else. That's what we're trying to do. It's quite hard without a building, but we will get there.

We have long-term relationships with people, which is one reason why we find some of the practices in the sector so difficult to deal with. It's easier to get paid to help someone to get scripted [get a prescription for methadone] and go into a small room than to try and reshape the political and social fabric so that it's more equitable. That's harder, it's more tiring.

Izzy HASL: It's also about long-term support for us. You can't really get that anywhere else. Even when people's housing problems are solved, we say: 'Stay in the group, because other things happen in life. You'll have a change of circumstances, your children might need housing...' And some people stay and some people don't.

Then coronavirus came and it was the biggest change we could imagine. I said: 'This is it, I told you! This is the big change of circumstances. We need the group so we can all get through this!'



(NOT) BEING TOGETHER

What was it like during the pandemic?

Ximena: *In Covid we were doing Zoom meetings. We didn't stop sharing and fighting for our rights. From the point of view of giving advice and information, it's not much different. But we missed being together, giving each other a hug, laughing a bit...*

Izzy: In a meeting you get more natural conversations and social interaction. On Zoom it's a bit different. The other thing about meeting in person is that we have kids' activities on the Saturday. All the HASL kids are together, sometimes they're making protest posters, we always hold up a banner together...

The children are part of the group as well. Kids know what's going on with their housing problems, they're directly affected by it. On Zoom they pop up on the screen and you can wave to them, but it's not the same. But people adjusted really well. I thought we'd lose people, and it's true that some people's internet connection wasn't good enough. But most people were able to participate.

Jess Turtle: The mutual aid movement [that arose in the early months of the pandemic], the whole solidarity of communities, that was interesting. At the same time it felt unconnected to a tradition...

Jon Glackin: We were handing out fucking phones so that [homelessness workers] doing outreach from home could talk to people on the streets. Camden wanted us to do a pizza delivery service!

Jess Turtle: Something really nefarious was going on in Camden during Covid...

Jon Glackin: They were distributing CPNs [community protection notices] like confetti. A guy could just be sitting down outside Sainsbury's and it's construed as begging. The Wellcome Trust put defensive architecture around their building [on Euston Road] in a place where homeless Roma people sleep. Roma people always get moved on quick, the police really trample on them...

Jess Turtle: It's always begging. They always use 'aggressive begging', which translates as 'antisocial behaviour'. I've intervened over this, arguing with police officers over what constitutes aggressive begging. They'll say members of the public have said they're scared, but often it's just someone sitting down, not even being proactive in the ask. That really winds me up. The Crime and Policing Act gets used all the time, the Vagrancy Act [1824] not so much...

Matt Turtle: In Bournemouth there was a community outcry over PSPOs [Public Space Protection Orders], and they retracted it under campaigning pressure. People really hate the hostile architecture.

Jon Glackin: Mutual aid groups... I loved them but I wasn't optimistic of them sustaining themselves. There was a real blitz spirit in March and April 2020. Everybody stepped in and filled the gap when statutory services collapsed for a month or so, and it felt like a movement. But that moment passed quickly, people went back to work, and they were knackered as well.

Some local authorities were looking to absorb aspects of mutual aid into the way they did procurement and commissioning, which we can be suspicious about, but which might end up being a good thing in parts of the country...

THE HORIZON

What about the future?

Jon Glackin: Lads lads lads, when are we ever going to realise: everybody's gone mad! I reckon our next campaign should be yellow buses and go and collect the homelessness sector, the senior management team, park up outside: 'Come on, get on the yellow bus, you're going to the special hospital...'

Jess Turtle: We went to Greece to talk to people, and they were saying: 'Will you set up a museum of homelessness in Athens?', and we said: 'That would be amazing, but you have to do it.' Each one would be different depending on what the community was and needed.

At the Simon Community, people would come to the main house in Kentish Town and they'd say 'I've just been to Liverpool' or 'I've been to Hackney and it's really bad there and we have to set a project up'. Anton would just give them a pile of blankets and say 'go and do it', and out of that Simon Communities popped up all over the UK.

Ximena HASL: *HASL is working towards equality. Everybody deserves a decent house, and why shouldn't everybody have a council house?* It's cheaper than a private house, and most people can't afford to pay the amount of money that a private landlord wants. Many of us have children, parents, other families who need our support—both here and in our countries. We have to send them money because life is not easy for them.

So we need a hand from the council. We need those houses now: 3- or 4- bedroom [places] that are actually big enough for a family. Life is really hard, since Covid there are no jobs. My husband was working full time, and now he's working part

time...We're fighting for that opportunity to have a better life for us, for our parents and our children and the new generations.

Izzy HASL: *My dream is of a world free from poverty where everyone has really spacious beautiful luxury council homes! In HASL one of our main slogans is: 'We need 3-, 4- and 5-bed council houses!' There aren't enough homes for families but there are all these 1- and 2-bed luxury penthouses. That's really insulting to us, it's not what local communities need.*

Kids need their own rooms, people are caring for elderly parents—the care that adult children provide is really vital. So people need space to live comfortably.

We see the suffering that people are going through when they live in overcrowded housing, or when they are experiencing domestic violence and have to go from temporary accommodation to temporary accommodation. And we see the reality of when people aren't given proper housing: how it affects every single aspect of their lives. We've also seen the difference that secure housing in people's local communities makes to their lives.

With the election in 2019, I was very naïve. Jeremy Corbyn was promising a hundred thousand council houses a year (and 50,000 housing association homes, making a total of 150,000 social-housing homes a year), so I thought: 'What will HASL become? Maybe we can become a sports and social club and we can all just hang out!' But it seems like we're going to have to carry on doing what we're doing for the time being...

Courts
of
Justice



About PILC:

The Public Interest Law Centre (PILC) exists to challenge systemic injustice through legal representation, strategic litigation, research and legal education. We hold government and public bodies to account, challenging unlawful policies and practices.

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