



Homelessness Prevention Forum
Decade Anniversary Event for 2023 HAW

Keynote speaker:
Gerry Skelton MBE

An ecological approach to addressing homelessness and related concepts, principles, and considerations.

7th December, 2023.

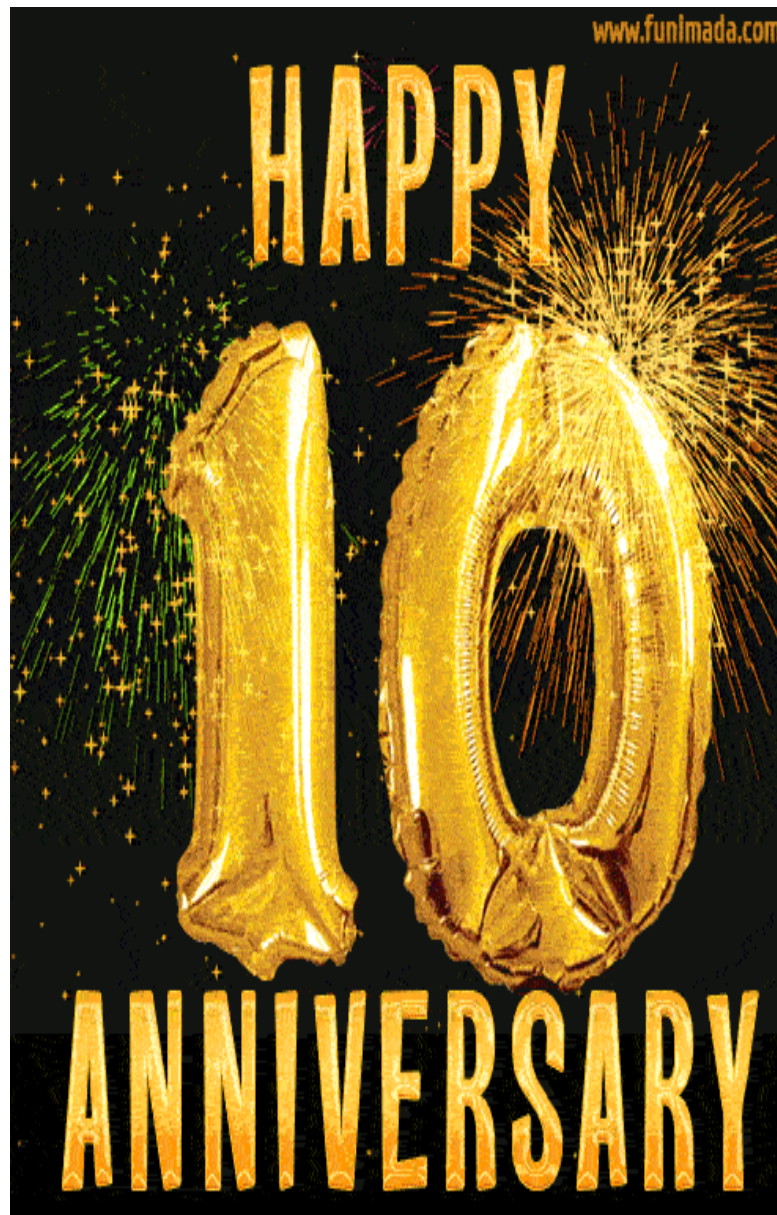
Hosted by Ark Housing.



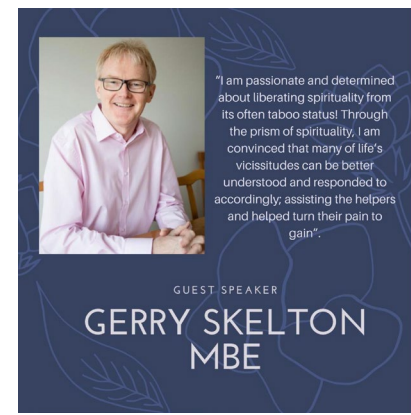
Happy Birthday Homelessness Prevention Forum: a decade of service 😊

- ❑ **Hearty CONGRATULATIONS** on a decade of service Homelessness Prevention Forum {HPF}.
- ❑ **“Sunlight’s a thing that needs a window before it enters a dark room. Windows don’t just happen”.** {R. S. Thomas: Poetry for supper}.
- ❑ I applaud the Chairs present (**Declan** and **Paul**) and past, and **ALL** the **HPF members** for their efforts in keeping the work going.
- ❑ A **special word of commendation** for **Declan Morris** who has been a founding and consistent member of the HPF and his commitment over many years to homeless prevention 😊
- ❑ My gratitude to the respective organisations (**Extern** and **NIACRO**) for their support of Declan and Paul in their respective chairing roles amidst their demanding day jobs!
- ❑ Thanks also to and for **Ark Housing** for offering their facility to host this event 😊
- ❑ And thanks, from me, for this delightful and honouring invite...and in the words of that invitation I received for today as keynote speaker:

“Gerry Skelton’s work was a huge catalyst in the formation of the Homelessness Prevention Forum and marked a sea change in how organisations in this sector worked together. Gerry’s many years of service in tackling and highlighting the issue of homelessness has been key to much of this work...your weight of expertise...”.



Who are you, Gerry?



Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Morning Seminar

20:20 vision: embracing 'Home-less-ness' as a compelling concern in Social Work Education Training and Practice

When: Monday, 2 December | 9.30am - 1pm
Where: Northern Ireland Social Care Council

Presented by Gerry Skelton, MBE, Social Work Lecturer

Book your place: www.niscoc.info/events



Gerry in a famous NI play!

Part of the script from Finn Kennedy's fabulously provocative play '*Hostel*', premiered at the Baby Grand Opera House in 2012 and this script excerpt from a follow-up show in 2017.

❑ **Picking up the play with Maria (resident) chatting about being homeless with Ciaran (keyworker).**

- **Maria (Resident):** It's not too bad. I just never thought in my life I'd end up a homeless person.
- **Ciaran (Keyworker):** *Listen, a good friend of mine, Gerry Skelton, said there's no such thing as a homeless person. It's a person who is homeless.*
- **Maria :** *What's the difference?*
- **Ciaran :** *Homelessness should never and will never define you Maria. You're many other things.*



Gerry S



Establishing a broad context

“Gerry campaigns...on everything” (Grace Price)...examples INC:

“The myriad issues confronting the Social Work, Social Care, Health and related professions generally, and practitioners specifically, can be readily viewed through the prism of homelessness.”

Indeed, arguably homelessness is not simply a practical reality but goes to the very core of one’s physical, social, psychological, emotional and spiritual identity; and resultant self esteem.”

(Gerry Skelton, 2011)

- Where **‘Homelessness’** and **Social Work Coalesce.**
- **Homeless NOT Hopeless!**
- **Women and Homelessness.**
- **‘Joining the dots:** prioritising homelessness as an explicit, fundamental concern for all’

20:20 vision: embracing ‘Home-less-ness’ as a compelling concern in Social Work Education, Training and Practice.



Home-Less-Ness comes in many guises...

HIDDEN and **VISIBLE!**



Effects of Homelessness can include:



Core systems that can *help* / *hinder*!



Helpful resources for audience to follow-up INC:

- 2015 NVTV interview of Declan Morris, Grace Price and Gerry Skelton addressing homelessness: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Elib6rJ730>
- Gerry Skelton's 2016 Interview with Chief Social Services Officer, Sean Holland: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z14d3NdrX9Q>
- 2016 Belfast Met's Gerry Skelton's final Homelessness Awareness Panel Event: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KA3Cdw4usMM
- {2017} "Gerry Skelton, in collaboration with and sponsored by Choice Housing and Simon Community, present Hostel at Baby Grand Opera House and subsequent panel Q&A to address homelessness": www.youtube.com/watch?v=bV9CqZr8xXU
- Gerry Skelton's (2017) article for the SCNI: **"GIVING HOMELESSNESS A HOME IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION, TRAINING AND PRACTICE"**
<https://www.simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Gerry-Skeltons-A-Decade-of-Homelessness-Awareness-Panel.pdf>
- 2019 "Gerry Skelton MBE Homelessness Event at the NI Social Care Council: <https://nisc.info/news/308-morning-seminar-where-homelessness-and-social-work-coalesce%20and%20the%20audio%20> And the accompanying audio / visual resources accessed directly: <https://view.pagetiger.com/bkwntax/1>
- 2023 Joint North South Public Health Conference (Nov, 29th) 'The Health-Wealth Divide: 'Leaving No One Behind'. The theme was health inequalities and homelessness was one of the subthemes. It should be available online in days and I can get that link to Declan and Paul for the HPForum if interested.

Gerry Skelton

- The NI conflict: https://start.etelligent.co.uk/app/b_e_e_viewEmail.ashx?l=gQ2ehkUyAL5bft3KKA312AzFkfNdIRA6A1710

Office of Social Services
'SOCIAL WORK AND HOMELESSNESS'
Reflections Framework (Nov, 2019).

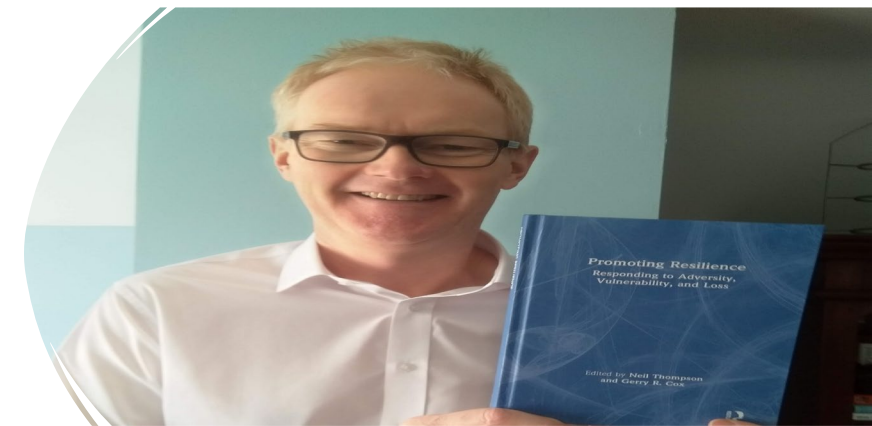
Available via: www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/reflections-homelessness.pdf



Skelton's (2020) Suggested Practice Implications and Recommendations

1. Establishing a *legal* requirement on all government apparatus to take homelessness seriously;
2. Addressing wider social systems, structures and processes that contribute to homelessness; or fail to respond appropriately;
3. Inculcating a 'duty to care' for eradicating blame-inducing, social excluding and individualistic narratives/explanations and the associated implied criminalisation;
4. Increasing appropriately costed social and private rented housing, coupled with greater tenant protection;
5. Addressing 'hidden homelessness' groups (including care leavers; LGBTIQ+);
6. Practitioners adopting a more enabling strengths-based approach;
7. Engaging those with homelessness experience in informing policy and practice;
8. Committing to social justice rather than a 'just us' basis for living and flourishing;
9. Ensuring homelessness is not a personal / professional blind spot; and
- 10. Never** placing a label before a person.

- Extract from Skelton's {Ch 10} 'Spirit of Resilience in homelessness' In Thompson and Cox (2020) 'Promoting Resilience: responding to adversity, vulnerability and loss...



Gerry Skelton

I had considered a number of inputs for today
hour keynote slot, INC:



- 1) How does homelessness impact a person;
 - 2) How can one get out of homelessness?
 - 3) What can be done?
 - 4) By who?
 - 5) When?
 - 6) Should we end homelessness?
- And so forth.
 - However, as you know...
- “Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration”** (Thomas Edison).
- So we are going to do some work 😊..

- Audience knows you know
- Group ‘Shout-Out’.

- 1) ?
- 2) ?
- 3) ?
- 4) ?
- 5) ?
- 6) ?

- Now, what if these questions were actually about YOU!

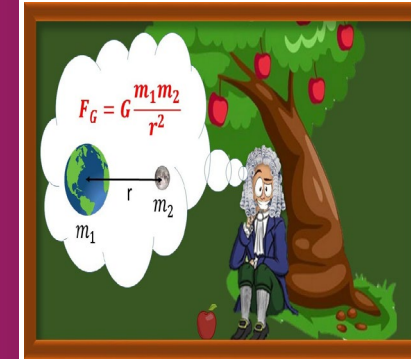
- So I’ll pause and ask YOU to revisit each question and ‘answer’ for YOU, assuming **‘the spectre of homelessness’** was in your life?

I want to quickly '*connect the dots*' that I'm famous for 😊

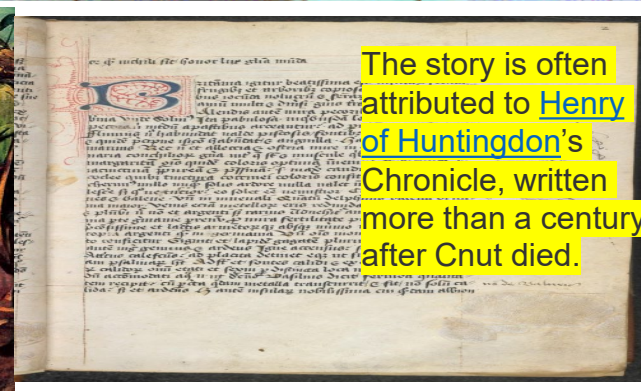
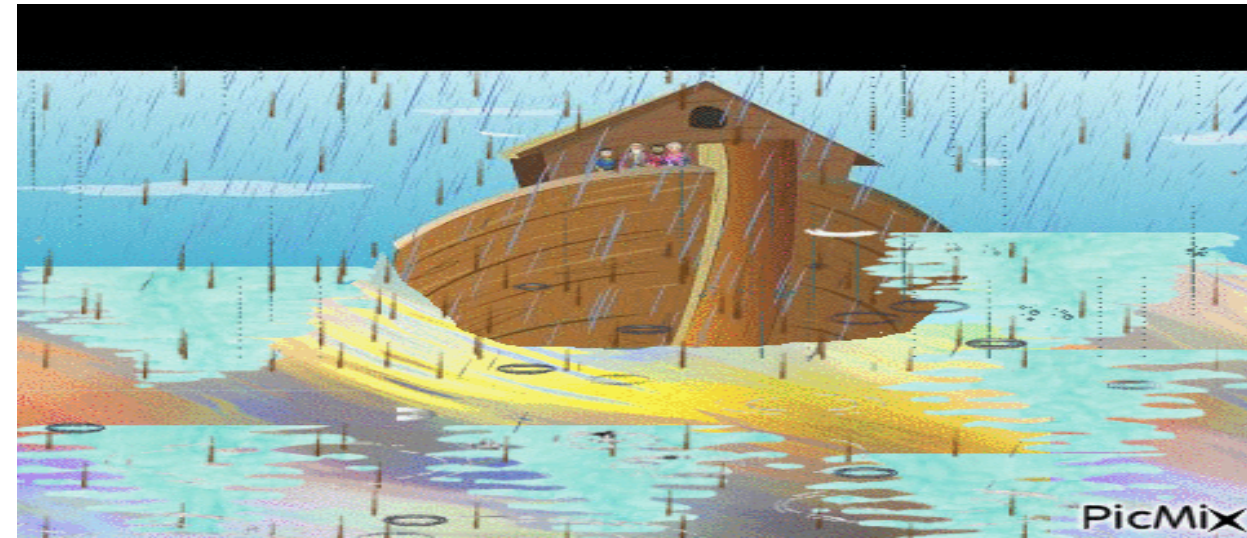
• What is the connection between our HAW (3-T's) theme, today's venue and homelessness?

- 1) 'Turn the Tide...can we? Water / Tide is the metaphor, as is movement (**Newton's** law of universal gravitation).
- 2) But I have reversed it: Tide = Edit 😊
- 3) We are kindly hosted by Ark housing...and flood was a major narrative there!
- 4) I argue that the 'Biblical Ark' (Noah, etc – and several versions precede that one in Genesis 6!)...was the original homeless hostel (perhaps the origins of term 'Floating support' 😊)!
- 5) There is a real danger that, like many other places in the world, we may have to face more than a TIDE but a 'flood' nay tsunami of homelessness!

❑ How can the myth of King Cnut (1016-1035 Danish king of England) help?



$$F_g = \frac{G m_1 m_2}{d^2}$$
$$G = 6.67 \times 10^{-11} \frac{\text{Nm}}{\text{kg}^2}$$



The story is often attributed to Henry of Huntingdon's Chronicle, written more than a century after Cnut died.

Who helps the helpers?

❑ So why do I need you, you need me, and we need each other to address ***'this spectre of homelessness'***?

❑ Please take a minute with a partner and think about the following questions...

➤ ...Please be prepared to share your responses too.

• ***Why do YOU continue working in homelessness (directorates, management, services, HPF, and so forth)?***



"One of the oldest human needs is having someone to wonder about you when you don't come home at night"

(Margaret Mead. 1901-1978)...

❑ I hope this speaks to your caring heart and role in addressing ***the spectre of homelessness*** wherever you meet it!

❑ Forward looking: So hopefully we are all enthused for another decade of:

➤ Service;

➤ Embracing the struggle(s)!

➤ Finding the energy to persevere.

➤ Building alliances, allies (within and without this room) 😊

❑ I have some reflections, ideas, encouragements, challenges, and likewise coming that will be of service...so hold on to your seatbelts 😊

Enablers or Inhibitors / Helping or Hindering

- You care, thank you 😊
- I have argued for years we need to introduce a 'Duty to Care' for the helping profession, organisations, personnel: not simply a 'duty of care'!
- But caring has a price! As Michel Foucault suggested, caring also provides opportunities for control!
- You have various levels of expertise and, to 'echo' Francis Bacon (1597), 'knowledge is.....?'
- Skelton (2017) talks about his new term, '**Labelisation**': the often dehumanising process of putting a label before a human being and judging them accordingly (see links below)!

www.choice-housing.org/news/2017/june/homelessness-in-the-spotlight-with-hard-hitting-production

www.choice-housing.org/news/2017/december/giving-homelessness-a-home

www.simoncommunity.org/assets/pdfs/Gerry-Skeltons-A-Decade-of-Homelessness-Awareness-Panel.pdf

- So NEVER place the word homeless in front of a person...no labels, please. If in doubt, it is a person who is, was, might become homeless, etc.
- 'Pay attention or the other pays the price'!
- I advocate adopting an **Ecological** approach.



“Everything impinges on everything else... Everything is potentially everywhere” (John Steinbeck)

❑ Gerry's choice of an Ecological approach prism.

➤ While it often purports to be new, it isn't!

❑ What does ecology mean?

❖ Audience response?

❑ Gerry's response:

➤ Q: What connects the following: people, birds, animals, insects, flowers, plants, trees, etc?

➤ Breath 😊 Air is a common connector 😊

➤ 'Eco' from Latin and Greek roots word broadly meaning earth / habitat / home!

➤ Life and relationships therein!

➤ Living organisms in and part of the same / differing surrounding environment(s), etc!

➤ The interconnectedness of us and our environment: natural world; social world, etc;

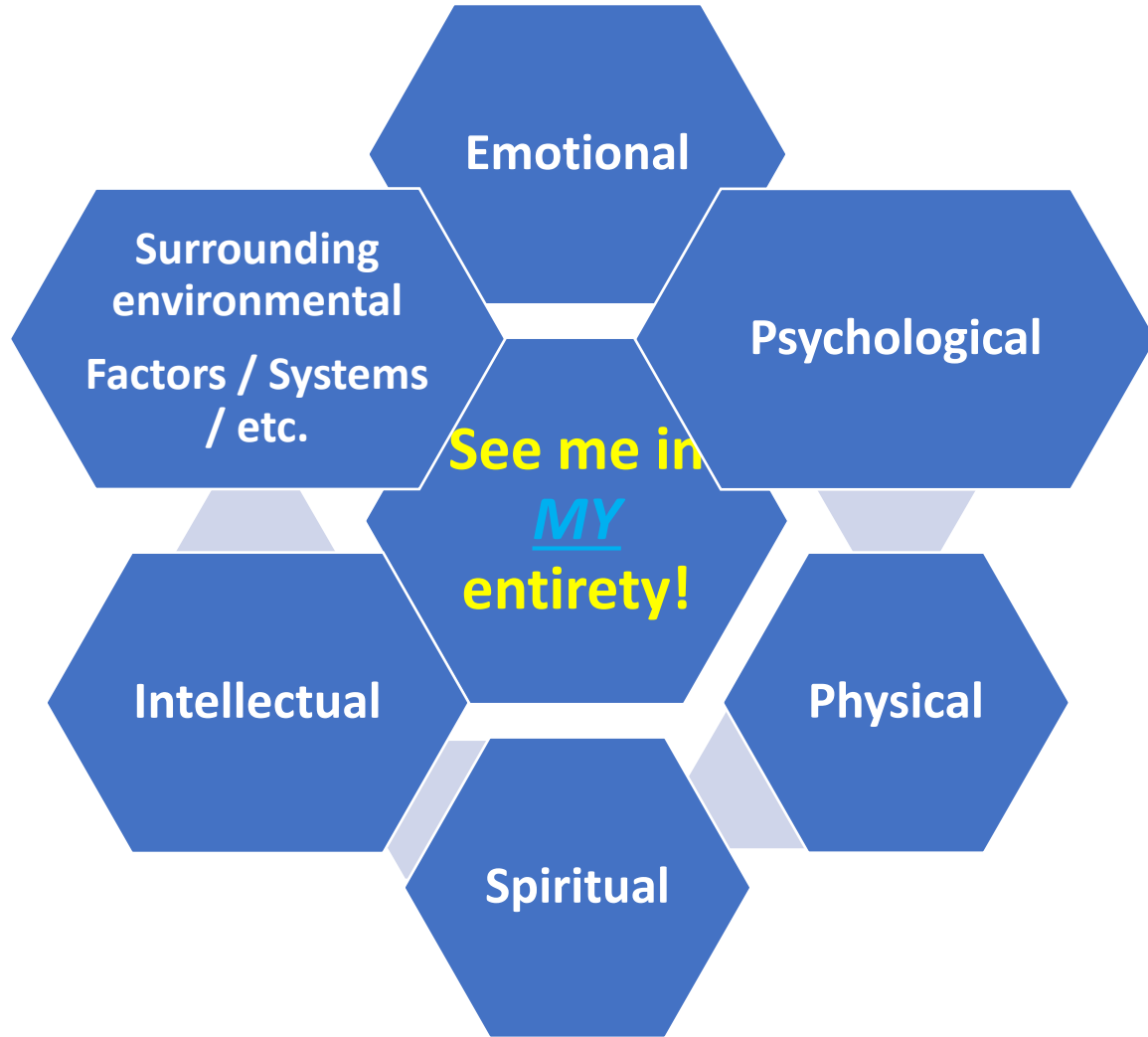
➤ Reciprocal relationships.

❑ BUT, why is it important to consider all aspects of a person / persons / group, etc? And how can I do this?

- An Ecological approach adopts a **holistic** perspective, understanding, approach, interpretation, stance, etc;
- Focus is more expansive than individualist (or often pathological!);
- Appreciates people do not live in a vacuum;
- We are impacted by our surroundings; and can impact / affect these too!
- People are surrounded by natural and created environments;
- Symbiotic relationship: we are mutually dependent as people and in terms of the planet! 😊
- Sometimes known as 'PIE' {Person-in Environment}!

- Informed person / worker / agency (not all are!).
- Informed Values, Principles and Ethical base.
- Resilience.
- Motivation.
- **“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm” {Ralph Waldo Emerson}.**
- Confidence;
- Competence;
- Creativity (De Bono) in managing self, resources, working with people, etc.
- Sympathy and Empathy.
- Interpersonal skills;
- Self-management / Professional management;
- Beware own reactions that inhibit self, others. For example, defensiveness, offensiveness, poor concentration / inattention, (**“When the only tool you have is a hammer.....every problem begins to resemble a nail”** (Abraham Maslow, 1966!)).
- Boundaries.
- Supervision!
- Professional judgement.
- Understanding and using power of self, others, systems, information, etc.
- Time! It is a core resource in all our lives, but...!
- Reflection.
- Managing complexity (Neil Thompson).
- Intra / inter disciplinary and multi-agency / multi-disciplinary working.
- ❑ Audience additional ideas?

Meaningful intervention will insist on an Ecological approach / perspective!



❑ Amazingly, having a home is NOT a right 😞

• What is an **SDG**?

• **UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals**

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

• [The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

• Unbelievably, no explicit highlighting of home / homelessness! However, having a home is included within SDG 11 and 'homelessness is implied'!



Ecological approach:

❑ What does a holistic perspective look like?

- Intervention looks at the internal AND external: surrounding environment / circumstances / systems; and impact thereof!
- What systems are we within / surrounded by?
- Some examples INC:
 - ❖ Family; education; community; housing; employment; religious / spiritual faith; friendships; culture; social; economic; political; etc., etc., etc!
- I / We are emotional, physical, intellectual, psychological, mental, spiritual, political, etc. 'beings' / 'doings'!
- A homelessness approach / assessment / intervention, etc., needs to take cognisance of all and respond accordingly!
- One example of this approach more broadly is Skelton's **Biopsychosocialspiritual approach**.
Links...

<https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/an-interview-with-gerry-skelton-on-social-work-and-spirituality/r/a11G0000002WHCgIAO>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaQHBoM_29U



- ❑ Post-Pandemic (revealed / caused a LOT of issues) and looking forward, there are a huge challenges facing homelessness and related services, including:
 - ❖ COST!
 - Available and anticipated reduced finances / budgets.
 - Arguments about moving away from 'costly hostels'!
 - Homelessness prevention being championed by the few and resourced accordingly!
 - Current low level of status (and resultant wages) in social care!
 - Meeting current demands and anticipated in post-Pandemic (hopefully) NI, increased demands, due to:
 - 'Cost-of-living crisis'!
 - High mortgage rate!
 - increased rents!
 - ❖ Decreased housing stock.
 - ❖ Increasing burdens placed on services and staff!
 - ❖ The wider need to TRANSFORM service provision, delivery, etc;
 - ❖ Personalisation.
 - ❖ Resistance to meaningful involvement and resourcing of those with lived experience!
 - ❖ Self-care;
 - ❖ Blame culture;
 - ❖ Not understanding risk.
 - ❖ Increasing digitisation and automation (and implications for helping and related services)! For example, Skelton's pity criticism about the **rhetoric of metric equation!**
 - ❖ And more food for...indigestion!
- Gerry Skelton



Some key concluding Gerry messages 1/2

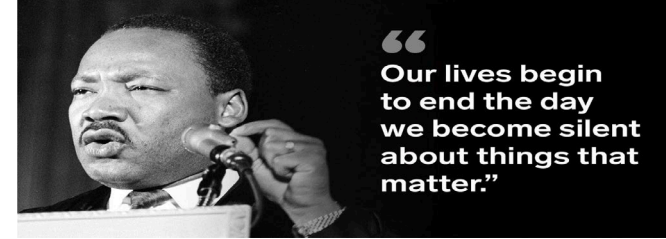


- Duty TO care, please (to complement Duty of Quality and of Care).
- Let's remove the taboos surrounding and often concealing homelessness...and reducing implied criminalisation!
- **"The rhetoric of metric"** (Skelton, 2010): Please don't fall into the managerialism trap of referring to people as numbers, statistics, units, letters!, etc!
- **Challenge labelisation** (placing a label before a person!) and **ANYone** (regardless of status, power, etc) using wording / phrases like: 'The Homeless'; 'Homeless people'!
- Sometimes we are the key; other times we're the lock or the door to homelessness...we can choose!
- Always remember you choose a helping job, role, etc...so offer to help not hinder, serve rather than be served!
- I care! And CARING is one of the heavy prices we pay for loving! But caring is a litmus test of meaningful, positive leadership!
- I'M fundamentally interested in making noise about issues of justice [not **JUST-US!**] and challenging silence!

- I care passionately about this theme...and the people caught up in its spectre!
- I want every resident, service user (and carer) to know that society / us care about their plight and will respond accordingly;
- Every practitioner needs to be supported/ challenged to address homelessness;
- Homelessness is often a personal and professional blind spot!
 - It can suffer from **ADD** (Attention Deficient Disorder)!
 - Or **HAS** (Homelessness Avoidance Syndrome)!
- I never want anyone to repeat the question once asked of me: '**What's homelessness got to do with social work?**' 😞
- So I am relentless in ensuring the issue of Home-Less-Ness is heard, seen, felt...and addressed!

Some key concluding Gerry messages 2/2

- I subscribe to “*Wherever possible homelessness should be prevented; but if homelessness cannot be prevented it should be rare, brief and non-recurring*” (Ending Homelessness Together Strategy, 2022-27)
- The person is always your primary concern (Cleveland quote...!).
- An ‘AOP lens’ is required to ensure appropriate, proportionate and just practice.
- Values, principles, ethics; importance of relationship; explanation of what you are intending / doing; ‘The emotionally intelligent practitioner, manager, director, CEO, etc; informed knowledge and understanding; skills set / base, etc., etc.
- **Centralising the *service user* and *carer* (PPI);**
- Echoing the clarion call co-opted (from rights movements) by the field of disability: ‘**Nothing about us without us**’.



- ❑ We can't afford to address homelessness...and we can't afford not to!
“**Love in its purest manifestation is service; not of self, but of others. It is also true, that in serving...we too are served**”

{Gerry Skelton}.

- ❑ ***Ignorance is not and can never be considered a personal / professional defence!***
- ❑ ***I am RESPONSIBLE for what I do and don't; contribute and distribute; help and hinder; attend / absent myself from!***
- ❑ ***Planning, Preparation and Prioritising leads to best practice;***
- ❑ ***Poor PP&P leads to...?!***

“The very best of us, personally and professionally, base our practice upon the touchstone of well-informed assumptions, beliefs, values, principles and ethics. These form the fundamental basis of every action we take and don't!

Ignorance of these is a dereliction of one's responsibility to self and others; irrespective of the station of life we find ourselves in.

To this end, we are duty-bound to excavate ignorance and cultivate understanding; as it is the latter from which real power to positively serve and influence derives” {Gerry Skelton}

Thank you and...

- All encouraging applause gratefully received!
- My gratitude to audiences across the globe... 😊



Festive greetings to you and yours 😊



skelton