HOTHouses 
FOR INNOVATION 
CHALLENGE 
WORKSHOP
South Yorkshire Crisis Skylight: 18th of October, 2017
The Dartington Service Design Lab
WORKSHOP BRIEFING
INTRODUCTION
How can we improve the lives of those who are homeless or living in vulnerable and insecure housing?

The Hothouses for Innovation initiative is a partnership between Crisis and the Dartington Service Design Lab (or ‘The Lab’). Crisis is a national charity for homeless people. It helps people directly out of homelessness and campaigns for the changes needed to solve it altogether. Crisis’ ultimate aim is to eradicate homelessness. The Lab are an independent charity that re-imagine the way services and public systems are designed and delivered in order to improve the lives of children, families and communities. The Lab have been commissioned by Crisis to undertake the Hothouse for Innovation initiative: a service design project aimed at improving outcomes for those who might benefit from Crisis support.

THE CHALLENGE WORKSHOP
Staff and members of Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire came together with key local partners over the course of a full-day workshop. The goals of the workshop were to (a) gather insight about what it is like to be homeless in South Yorkshire (and more specifically in Doncaster), and what it was like to deliver and receive the Crisis service; (b) use these insights to develop a long-list of challenges experienced by people facing homelessness and those working to support people facing homelessness, and; (c) reframe the challenges as questions before voting for a shortlist of priority challenges that Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire could address.

The session did not explore solutions or innovations. It was essential, before moving on to consider any solutions or ideas, to explore and obtain some consensus about the biggest challenges faced by Crisis members and staff. This sequencing helps ensure innovations and ideas are developed in response to the agreed priority challenge.

Please note: the workshop agenda and design activities can be found in the appendix.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS
There were around 17 Crisis staff, 11 Crisis members, and 5 partner organisations (see appendix for partners). The session was facilitated by the Dartington Service Design Lab: Kate Tobin, Service Design Specialist; Ben Hartridge, Researcher; Maria Portugal, Communications and Design Specialist; Finlay Green, Researcher.

PRIORITY CHALLENGES
The teams were asked to vote for priority challenges guided by the following:

1. Is this challenge important to you?
2. Is there agreement that it is important to others?
3. Is it something Crisis can reasonably be expected to address?

The following challenges selected by the teams are ranked in order of the percentage of votes received.
CHALLENGES RANKED IN ORDER OF THE PERCENTAGE OF VOTES RECEIVED

1. How can Crisis foster an environment that allows for more positive and effective collaborations with partners?

Rationale:
There was a recognition that services in South Yorkshire are experiencing deep cuts to budgets. It was felt that services are facing pressure to do the same job with less resource and are experiencing high levels of staff turnover. The team reflected on whether Crisis could work with partners in a more person-centred way in light of the sector-wide challenges. Related risks include:

- Crisis staff taking on the roles and responsibilities of other services that are under resourced.
- The perception/treatment of Crisis simply as a financial resource (e.g. organisations refer clients to Crisis on the promise or expectation Crisis will provide money for a tenancy deposit – which isn’t always the case).
- It was felt some partners over-promise what Crisis are able to offer e.g. if you do course X, you will get housed by Crisis; if you do Y, you will get a safety deposit for a house from Crisis. Crisis felt that in such cases they were left having to carefully manage member expectations and start on the back foot.
- Fewer referrals. Statutory services and hostels are often the first point of contact for Crisis’ target group. Crisis are reliant upon partners to think of Crisis and then refer a potential member to the appropriate Crisis team (although the simplicity of the Crisis referral pathway was praised by one of the partners in attendance).

Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire has used several strategies in an attempt to create more equitable and meaningful partnerships (e.g. peer-led groups, partnering with others, shadowing opportunities).

2. How do we ensure the public, partners and potential members are aware of Crisis and understand its work and the benefit of the service Crisis offers? How can Crisis raise their publicity and profile in South Yorkshire? This includes the public, potential members (e.g. rough sleepers), local authorities and other services.

Rationale:
Staff associated Crisis’ lack of profile in the South Yorkshire with a number of other challenges:

- It was felt that Crisis had a low profile among other services and partners in South Yorkshire. This makes the development of partnerships with other organisations and local authorities particularly challenging across South Yorkshire.
- Once partnerships are established, the effectiveness (i.e. number of referrals, appropriateness of referrals and type of supplementary/concurrent support) may be limited by partners’ lack of awareness of what Crisis can offer/is offering a member.
- Recruitment was identified as a real challenge for the Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire. It was felt that if Crisis had a better profile in South Yorkshire, it might draw a higher calibre of applicants to apply.

Crisis’ lack of profile in South Yorkshire was attributed to:

- a lack of regional fundraising: events and shops would better embed the work of Crisis in the community and ‘put Crisis’ name out there’. Several teams felt that the profile of Crisis was being promoted on a national level, and through individual relationships with local professionals on an ad hoc basis, but there was no regional strategy to strengthen Crisis’ profile in South Yorkshire.
- a lack of a defined and measured marketing strategy
- difficulties maintaining good quality relationships with partners. While this remains a priority for Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire, the maintenance of these relationships requires continual attention, especially in cases of high staff turnover within partnership agencies. Operational/frontline staff have high caseloads and do not have enough time to dedicate to continually updating/briefing partners.
- a lack of brand visibility during class delivery in hostels by sessional tutors. Members often don’t know that it’s Crisis delivering the class. Tutors don’t wear any Crisis branding and the hostel and sessional tutors may be less familiar with the full range of support provided by Crisis from which members could benefit.

3. How can Crisis ensure members are adequately supported in relation to any mental health difficulties? Could Crisis get more support from the mental health sector for members who, for example, are feeling stressed out, or are not engaging?

Rationale:
Poor mental health is a significant factor contributing to and compounding homelessness. It was also identified by the workshop participants as a significant barrier to engagement and progression. There are high levels of need relating to mental health in the population Crisis work with, yet specific service provision is felt to be inadequate. Crisis staff feel uncomfortable filling in the large gaps in service provision because they do not feel qualified, but at the same time do not want to ‘fail’ members who need the support.

What opportunities might there be around an in-house mental health worker? How can Crisis develop robust partnerships with mental health services? How can Crisis better support members struggling with mental health difficulties who only attend classes?

4. How can we shift to a more intensive way of working over a shorter period of time, rather than a ‘drip-drip’ approach that’s less intensive over a considerably longer period of time?

Rationale:
Staff felt that not enough could be achieved if they only met with a member once a week for an hour. For some Crisis members, it was argued that momentum was lost with a less intensive approach over a longer period of time. It was thought that a more intensive approach over a shorter period (similar, for example, to one adopted by the Princes Trust) had the potential for more immediate, tangible achievements for members that would encourage progress and increase motivation.

5. How can we better support members who are actively struggling with alcohol and drug problems?

Rationale:
Drug or alcohol dependency is one of the most important barriers to a member’s progression. One aspect of this challenge is that Crisis should always be looking at how to improve the way it supports members to overcome this barrier. The second aspect recognises that a significant proportion of members have an on-going dependency, and asks Crisis what its role is going forward in providing support to members with ongoing dependency.

6. How can Crisis extend their offer to ensure housing and/or employment is adequately sustained?

Rationale:
Staff want to find a way to ensure housing and/or employment is sustained for the first 12 months after members have a house and/or job. Based on past staff experiences, in some cases, if members are not offered ongoing support after they become housed or gain employment, it is likely that members will return to a vulnerable situation. Although the purpose of the session was to focus on challenges, staff members suggested Crisis could find and train volunteers who would be willing to get in touch with former members once a week or every two weeks to check if their situation has improved.

7. Is there a way for Crisis to increase the number of locations where members can access support for free?

Rationale:
While Crisis covers the entirety of South Yorkshire, there is a smaller number of locations in which classes are provided. Some members have to travel to different areas or towns to attend classes and meet their coaches. Some members need financial support for travel to meet with their progression coach or attend classes (although Crisis are careful not to create a dependency that members will only attend classes if they receive travel expenses).

Note: This links to another point about the challenges of covering a wide geographical area.

8. How do we better integrate sessional tutors into Crisis services, and its processes and values?

Rationale:
The group felt that there were a few issues with the current model of sessional tutors. Sessional tutors are only paid for lesson time, yet they are expected to do a range of work outside of lessons, from delivering referrals to general administration. This puts an unfair strain on sessional tutors.

9. What would it take to overcome the barrier of a lack of motivation? How do we sustain motivation of members who are ready for housing, employment and/or volunteering?

Rationale:
Some of the teams identified a lack of motivation as a key barrier to engagement with Crisis. Crisis and a member’s ability to move out of homelessness. The feeling was that if you can increase member motivation, it will have a substantial impact on a member’s life. As a service that engages with members on a voluntary basis, staff found lack of motivation difficult to address. This was felt to be a particular challenge for the progression coaches. One of the teams argued the lack of motivation is deeply connected to the poor/absent mental health provision. Most of staff members from the group that prioritised this challenge believed that it is difficult to sustain motivation for members who want to get a house or a job throughout their experience with Crisis. Although, the purpose of the session was not to talk about ideas or innovations, the team suggested a form of mental health training for progression coaches and other members of staff to identify, engage and sustain members’ motivation.

10. How do we maximise staff time and resources to deal with the large South Yorkshire area? How can we minimise no-shows attributed to the large geographical spread of the Skylight?

Rationale:
Some of the teams felt that an exclusive outreach model, coupled with the size of the South Yorkshire area, created unique challenges.

- The area covered is considerable, with staff members spending a lot of time travelling to and from meetings that members may, or may not attend. No-shows have larger implications for the outreach model in terms of travel and staff resource compared with a building-based model.
- The extensive coverage makes it more difficult for members to attend classes due to travel cost and time (although, the opposite could easily be argued).
- There was also a feeling that where classes are offered and the way in which staff are located could be planned more efficiently. A pattern identified described how classes in new areas tend to have less demand, so they are cut to create efficiencies, but this restricts the offer to members in these areas, in turn impacting negatively on demand.
11. How can we better identify, reach and engage with potential members that are not connected to partners? How can we set up processes that help members to reach Crisis without going through partners?

Rationale:
The challenge stems from the difficulties related to Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire operating an exclusively outreach-based model. Classes are delivered by Crisis within partner organisations. As a consequence, if a member is asked to leave a hostel, the member is unable to access the support or classes offered by Crisis within that hostel. Similarly, some Crisis members who have moved on from a hostel into accommodation may be reluctant (for very good reasons) to attend classes offered by Crisis within that hostel. It might feel like a step backwards and perhaps not the best environment for the member to be in. There is a feeling that Crisis receive fewer self-referrals than partnership referrals, although data are not available to check this. Self-referrals and partnership referrals are not recorded separately. This led to a discussion about whether Crisis could create opportunities for potential members to reach out directly and receive support from Crisis without having to go through partners. Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire do not have the capacity to accept new members on a ‘walk-in’ basis, although the Skylight has established ‘drop-ins’ within partner organisations including food banks. How can Crisis create more efficient avenues for potential members to seek help directly?

12. Could we make Renting Ready more practical and engaging?

Rationale:
The team were interested in taking another look at refining and re-designing the content, materials and delivery format of the Renting Ready classes alongside making property viewings easier to arrange.

13. How do we better address the complex needs of our members to enable them to engage in Crisis’ services, and sustain their engagement?

Rationale:
Staff, members and partners felt that the main barrier to attendance and engagement in Crisis classes was the severity and complexity of members’ needs. The Experience Map (see appendix) exercise demonstrated the significance of this challenge. There were multiple points at which the persona – a fictional character developed by the group – would be likely to disengagement due to the numerous challenges they faced, for example: ending up back in jail due to a violation of their probation; being readmitted to hospital due to chronic health issues; or, failing to attend and engage due to addiction problems. While this is obviously something that Crisis is aware of, the group felt that it was important to focus explicitly on this challenge in relation to attendance and engagement.

14. How can we improve communication and prevent misperceptions about what can be achieved with Crisis?

Rationale:
Staff also spoke about the (mis)communication and varying levels of awareness from some partners about what clients could expect from Crisis. This led to clients having different expectations about what Crisis was able to provide.

- In some cases, partners say that Crisis can solve a multitude of problems, unfairly raising the hopes of potential members about Crisis’ ability to help members obtain accommodation.

- In other cases, partner understanding is exclusively based on past experience with a handful of their own clients moving through the Crisis service. Partner perception of what Crisis is able to do is therefore based on the tailored support provided to the handful of clients. The support provided to those members may or may not be suitable for the next client.

- Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire operates across four local authorities. It is less established in some areas and as such awareness of the Crisis offer in these areas is more limited. Potential partners are not aware of all the different types of support Crisis is able to provide and consequently do not refer appropriately.

15. How can Crisis refine the role of coaches and maximise their effectiveness and productivity in South Yorkshire?

Rationale:
Some members of staff were concerned about the role and responsibilities of coaches in South Yorkshire. There was a recognition that the role of coaches in South Yorkshire is different compared with the other Skylights. The role of coaches in South Yorkshire is far reaching and complex – they also act as mediators for different types of services and support – which makes it difficult to manage and sufficiently measure their impact within the organisation.

There are a number of issues concerning the role of coaches.

(1) First meeting with a new member: Most coaches in Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire have to meet members in public spaces or coffee shops for their first assessment. This initial approach to get to know the members happens through an eight-page form that includes personal and private questions about their current situation.

(2) Different roles/expectations: Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire staff find it difficult to square the wide-ranging role of the progression coach with members’ expectations about the type of services that Crisis provide.

(3) Measuring the impact: The role of a progression coach is complex and evolving meaning it can be challenging to effectively measure their impact and identify opportunities to maximise effectiveness.

NEXT STEPS
In November 2017, the priority challenges will be presented to the Crisis Evaluation and Insight Board made up of senior representatives from across Crisis. The Board will discuss and agree one challenge for Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire to take forward as part of the Hothouses for Innovation initiative.

In January 2018, the Lab will facilitate an intensive ‘Design Sprint’ with Crisis Skylight South Yorkshire that will bring members, staff and partners back together to co-design two or three prototype solutions to the priority challenge.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED?
All staff, members and volunteers across Crisis will be invited to contribute ideas and innovations that respond to South Yorkshire’s prioritised challenge, which will be announced in November 2017.
CHALLENGE WORKSHOP AGENDA
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

Morning session 10 - 12pm
Participants: Staff only

CHALLENGES
Brief scene setting for staff
Rapid long-list of challenges
Challenge refinement exercise (in teams)

THE VOTE AND REFLECTIONS
Lunch: 12 - 1pm

Afternoon session: 1 - 4pm
Participants: Members, partners and staff

SETTING THE SCENE
Brief scene setting for members, partners (and re-cap for staff)
Gathering insight from members, partners and staff
Personas exercise (teams)
Experience Map exercise (teams)

BREAK (3pm – 3.10pm)

CHALLENGES
Long-list of challenges from members, partners and staff
Challenge refinement exercise (teams)

THE VOTE AND FINAL REFLECTIONS

WORKSHOP BRIEFING

GATHERING INSIGHT: PERSONA EXERCISE

Personas are fictional characters that could potentially benefit from Crisis support. Teams made up of staff, members and partners developed meaningful and grounded characters based on their direct experience of working with and supporting those facing homelessness, and based on their own experiences of homelessness. The personas fulfilled several functions:

(1) Generation of insights to inform service design. Personas enabled teams to explore why different types of individuals may or may not engage with the Crisis service.

(2) A useful method to prototype the characteristics and needs of different sub-groups that could benefit more effectively from the service. Personas provide a starting point to map out what works best for whom and under what circumstances.

(3) Multiple personas demonstrate there are many different types of Crisis members. There is no such thing as a ‘typical’ Crisis member. Homelessness can happen for a range of systemic and/or individual reasons that require different, tailored supports and engagement strategies.

(4) Provides a layer of protection for existing members. Personas allowed teams to explore the needs and interests of fictional Crisis members without requiring personal disclosures from existing members.

The next section provides some examples of the fictional characters that were developed in teams.
PERSONA 1. ANGELA

Age: 19
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: British
Living Situation: At the moment she is sofa-surfing after being barred from the hostel for stealing from a staff member. She stays at friends’ houses for a couple of nights at a time. She feels guilty and wants her own space.
My situation - She started using drugs when she was 13 and first tried heroin at 16. Her boyfriend at the time was a drug dealer. She would pay Angela to hide drugs in her mum’s house. Her mum found them, and Angela was kicked out. - She moved in with her boyfriend. It was fun at first, but then they started to fight all the time and she left the flat. She didn’t have anywhere to go, but couldn’t be around him anymore.
My interests and goals - Sometimes Angela tells services that she thinks they want to hear. She’ll tell the DWP she wants a job. She’ll tell another service she wants qualifications. In reality, she wants to feel better about herself.
My skills - She has never had a job.
- She left school with no qualifications.
- She has attended, but not completed a number of college courses.
Service involvement - There are a lot of services around her.
- Several people have restraining orders against her.
- She is known to the police with intelligence that she is involved in organised crime, specifically the distribution of illicit substances.
- She has a history of custodial sentences.
- She is well known to the Department for Work and Pensions; she’s been on benefits her entire adult life.
- She receives a prescription for methadone from her GP which she collects at the pharmacy.
Reason for me to engage with Crisis - She first heard about Crisis through the hostel.
- She was placed on a living order that specified she must seek support from Crisis.
Reasons for me not to engage with Crisis - The amount of paperwork is daunting
- The routine necessary to attend meetings/classes
Relationship Map - In my inner circle are the other rough sleepers and users that make up the community that George is part of.
- Beyond that sit both his children and his mum, with whom George has a distant relationship.
- Beyond that sit professionals

PERSONA 2. GEORGE

Age: 35
Gender: Male
Ethnicity: British
Living Situation: A rough sleeper; in and out of a bed of his own and living at Wharf House (a homeless hostel).
My situation - Financial - on housing benefit and universal credit
- Living situation - George is unable to stay at Wharf House for a sustained period of time.
- He violates his probation conditions (returns to jail for short periods of time, and subsequently loses his bed).
- He misses nights due to better offers from other rough sleepers and users.
- Health issues - he has to enter hospital as an in-patient sometimes due to chronic health issues and usually does so without telling Wharf House - he subsequently loses his bed.
- Emotional health - George suffers from isolation, depression, anxiety, and personality disorder. Due to regular substance misuse, he is often unable to access the prescription he needs from the GP.
- Physical health - George suffers from respiratory and mobility issues as well as issues related to blood-borne viruses.
My interests and goals - George has two children. One is in care, the other lives with George’s mum. His main goals are to re-establish contact with both children, get and stay clean and establish sustainable housing. His secondary goal is to do some further education.
My skills - George has little formal experience, other than some cleaning and labouring experience. However, he does have lots of life experience that he feels he could share with others in his position as a peer mentor, once his situation has improved. He also plays the guitar well.
Service involvement - George has a social worker, a Community Psychiatric Nurse and an addictions worker, as well as a key worker from Wharf House.
- However, the professionals around George don’t work together effectively - some of George’s mental health issues remain undiagnosed due to his substance use.
- There is lots of back and forth between professionals and George often has to relay difficult stories to multiple professionals.
- At the same time, when he does manage to get an appointment with the GP, he has to get diagnosed, he misses it, making it difficult for George to improve his situation.
Reason for me to engage with Crisis - The opportunity to learning new things, meet new people and get out there more.
- More independence
- The Crisis classes seem more approachable and less intimidating than formal education
- The Renting Ready course offers George a route towards better, more sustainable housing.
- He likes the idea of coaching support to help him work out his issues.
Reason for me not to engage with Crisis - He’s never heard of them before so there’s some ‘fear of the unknown’.
- Are Crisis staff just another bunch of professionals? George has ‘service fatigue’
- George’s chaotic situation makes it difficult for him to establish the routine necessary to attend meetings/classes.
- The amount of paperwork is daunting

PERSONA 3. CHANTELLE

Age: 17
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: British
Living Situation: Street homeless
My situation - Chantelle’s relationship with her parents has always been difficult, but it broke down when she told them that she is pregnant.
- She doesn’t attend education, doesn’t have a job and is not in receipt of benefits.
- Chantelle experiences emotional difficulties, including low self-esteem.
My interests and goals - Chantelle needs her own place to raise her baby.
- Eventually, she wants to go back to college.
My skills - Chantelle is really talkative and has good communication skills.
- She left school with 5 GCSEs, and is especially good at art.
Service involvement - Social services have been in contact with Chantelle about her baby.
- She received some pastoral care when she was attending school.
- Now that she’s sleeping rough, Chantelle doesn’t see services very often.
Reason for me to engage with Crisis - Chantelle could find out what her options are by having a 1:1 session with a Progression Coach.
- From there she could be signposted to the Renting Ready course and other short courses.
- If she chooses to go along to these she will develop her confidence and hobbies.
- Most importantly, Crisis can help Chantelle get the support she needs with her baby.
Reason for me not to engage with Crisis - She wants a home
- She wants to be a singer
- She wants to rebuild family/friends
She wants to be a singer
- She wants to be a singer
- She is a positive individual who has found herself homeless. She sofa-surfed with friends but can’t anymore. She had council flat but lost it due to parties and complaints. She’s on benefits – she also busks – she did some exams at school and passed them.
My skills - She can sing
- Customer Service – dealing with public
Good at handling money
My Interests and goals - She wants a home
- She wants a job
She’s a good singer
- She wants to rebuild family/friends
She wants to be a singer
- She wants to rebuild family/friends
- She has a distant relationship with her family
- She has a distant relationship with her family
- She misses her mum. His main goals are to re-establish contact with both children, get and stay clean and establish sustainable housing. His secondary goal is to do some further education.
Reason for me to engage with Crisis - She wants a home
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Good at handling money
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Relationship Map - In his inner circle are the other rough sleepers and users that make up the community that George is part of.
- Beyond that sit both his children and his mum, with whom George has a distant relationship.
- Beyond that sit professionals

PERSONA 4. JOANNA

Name: Joanna
Age: 16
Gender: Female
Ethnicity: British
Living situation: Homeless (street)
My situation - She is a positive individual who has found herself homeless. She sofa-surfed with friends but can’t anymore. She had council flat but lost it due to parties and complaints. She’s on benefits – she also busks – she did some exams at school and passed them.
My skills - She can sing
- Customer Service – dealing with public
Good at handling money
My Interests and goals - She wants a home
- She wants a job
- She’s a good singer
- She wants to rebuild family/friends
- She wants to be a singer
- She has a distant relationship with her family
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