Homelessness in Kuala Lumpur

An Intractable Problem

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We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them

Albert Einstein
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2 Abstract

Homelessness is a persistent social and economic issue for countries around the world that continues to exist despite many and continuing attempts to reduce or eradicate it. Malaysia is no exception. Homeless people, particularly those without work or with unmanaged health and addiction issues, experience exclusion at many levels.

There is a growing body of research from Europe and North America on prevention of homelessness and possible pathways out of it. Significantly more evidence and data guiding action in SE Asia, and Malaysia in particular, is required.

This paper provides an overview of homelessness in central Kuala Lumpur. It is informed by stakeholder interviews, site surveys and current policy and practice approaches internationally and in Malaysia. A roadmap forward identifies suggestion action at street/neighbourhood; city; and state & national level.
3 Introduction

When Think City conducted its detailed baseline study and community engagement in the heritage core of Kuala Lumpur, the presence of homeless people was raised in consultations again and again as an issue influencing perception of safety, a deterrent for customers visiting businesses or students entering educational institutions. In order to rejuvenate the heritage core of Kuala Lumpur, the rough sleeping in the heritage core must be addressed in a way that balances the needs of homeless people, local enterprises and residents.

In Malaysia and the wider SE Asian region, homeless people have become a more visible component of the urban ecosystem signaling a rise in human insecurity. Their needs and welfare deserve to be considered alongside the concerns of business leaders about the impact of homeless on the local economy.

In 2005, the world homeless population was estimated to be 100 million but depending on definitions could be as high as 1.6 billion (Hamad, 2017; Homeless World Cup Foundation, 2018). For Malaysia, there are no official statistics. Lack of data including person specific data hinders prioritising services for those most at need and to measure effectiveness of interventions (UN-Habitat, 2000).

Homelessness is also a very value-laden issue with diverging views on causes and solutions. Understanding of these issues has changed considerably over the past couple of decades.

Homelessness exists in countries around the world and no universal solution has been found. On the contrary, in many countries, rates are rising. Homelessness is an intractable problem, one that cannot be solved by conventional solutions, institutions operating in silos or fragmented civil society organisations.

This paper has been developed to guide Think City and others in determining possible approaches to address homelessness and is based on a search of the literature and discussions with relevant government departments, large NGOs and selected researchers. It starts with an overview of homelessness definitions, causes and cost. Following it summarises international approaches, provides an overview of the policy context in Malaysia and a description of the homelessness community in Kuala Lumpur and its heritage core and concludes with a suggested roadmap forward.

The paper also serves as a foundation to build a more cohesive and unified understanding of what homelessness is in a Malaysian context. It highlights the complex interactions of system and personal factors contributing to a person becoming homeless and provides a snapshot of international case studies of intervention approaches that can be drawn on to devise a Kuala Lumpur-specific set of interventions. The study also highlights the need for urgency in new approaches and acts as a trigger for stakeholders to consider a road map for finding sustainable exit strategies for the homeless.
4 What is homelessness?

INTERNATIONAL DEFINITIONS
There is not one internationally accepted definition of homelessness. At one end it is purely the absence of shelter or sleeping rough or at emergency shelters. At the other end of the spectrum is a quite complex United Nations definition (Casavant, 1999) which was developed in 1987, the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless, with its goal for adequate shelter for all by 2000. It has been adapted by the Canadian Observatory for Homelessness and reads:

*Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household’s financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, stressful and distressing* (The Homelessness Hub, no date).

The broader definition recognises the human insecurity and the risk to individual and societal development across the continuum from people sleeping rough to boarding houses, shelters, moving from friend to friend or insecure tenure and the threat of homelessness. The State of Alberta abbreviated the definition to: ‘*Those who do not have safe, affordable, appropriate, permanent housing to which they can return whenever they choose*’.

Table 1 has been developed by the European Observatory on Homelessness (Feantsa) and illustrates the conceptual categories of various types of homelessness including those at risk (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010). A very similar Canadian version, also with four categories exist (The Homelessness Hub, no date). A list of terms related to homelessness and their definitions can be found in Appendix 1.

The type of definition that is used and commonly understood by government, civil society and community influences the views of homeless people as well as policy formulation and scope of interventions.
Table 1: European observatory on homelessness (Feantsa) Typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Category</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
<th>Generic Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roofless</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 People Living Rough</td>
<td>1.1 Public space/external space</td>
<td>Living in the streets or public spaces, without a shelter that can be defined as living quarters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 People in emergency accommodation</td>
<td>2.1 Night shelter</td>
<td>People with no usual place of residence who make use of overnight shelter, low threshold shelter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 People in accommodation for the homeless</td>
<td>3.1 Homeless hostel</td>
<td>Where the period of stay is intended to be short term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 Temporary accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 Transitional supported accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 People in Women’s Shelter</td>
<td>4.1 Women’s shelter accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 People in accommodation for immigrants</td>
<td>5.1 Temporary accommodation/reception centres</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2 Migrant workers accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 People due to be released from institutions</td>
<td>6.1 Penal institutions</td>
<td>No housing available prior to release</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 Medical institutions (*)</td>
<td>Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Children’s institutions/homes</td>
<td>No housing identified (e.g. by 18th birthday)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)</td>
<td>7.1 Residential care for older homeless people</td>
<td>Long stay accommodation with care for formerly homeless people (normally more than one year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2 Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 People living in insecure accommodation</td>
<td>8.1 Temporarily with family/friends</td>
<td>Living in conventional housing but not the usual place of residence due to lack of housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.2 No legal/subtenancy</td>
<td>Occupation of dwelling with no legal tenancy/illegal occupation of a dwelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.3 Illegal occupation of land</td>
<td>Occupation of land with no legal rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 People living under threat of eviction</td>
<td>9.1 Legal orders enforced (rented)</td>
<td>Where orders for eviction are operative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.2 Re-possession orders (owned)</td>
<td>Where mortgagee has legal order to re-possess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 People living under threat of violence</td>
<td>10.1 Police recorded incidents</td>
<td>Where police action is taken to ensure place of safety for victims of domestic violence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 People living in temporary/ non-conventional structures</td>
<td>11.1 Mobile homes</td>
<td>Not intended as place of usual residence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.2 Non-conventional building</td>
<td>Makeshift shelter, shack or shanty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.3 Temporary structure</td>
<td>Semi-permanent structure hut or cabin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 People living in unfit housing</td>
<td>12.1 Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation</td>
<td>Defined as unfit for habitation by national legislation or building regulations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 People living in extreme overcrowding</td>
<td>13.1 Highest national norm of overcrowding</td>
<td>Defined as exceeding national density standard for floor-space or useable rooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Short stay is defined as normally less than one year; Long stay in defined as more than one year.

(*) Includes drug rehabilitation institutions, psychiatric hospitals etc.

Source: European Consensus Conference on Homelessness (Busch-Geertsema et al., 2010)

**Malaysian definition**

Currently, there is no agreed definition of homelessness (Ghee and Omar, 2015). However, applying the European typology above, government, civil society and general public would agree that roofless and to a certain extent houseless people (in temporary accommodation) are homeless. This report will also use the term homeless person to mean someone who sleeps in the streets or is using temporary and transit shelters.

The Malaysian term ‘Gelandangan’ has derogatory connotations which can most closely be translated as ‘tramp’, implying vagrancy and being a nuisance (Levinson, 2004, p308). Anecdotally, homeless people do not like this term and more recently have asked to be called ‘street friends’ (Malay Mail Online, 2017).
5 Understanding causes of homelessness

Over the past fifty years, the understanding of the causes of homelessness has changed, influenced by research mainly in high income countries. Until the 1970’s it was presumed that homelessness reflected disaffiliation from society, meaning their needs and characteristics made them homeless.

Development of current understanding of homelessness

As numbers of homeless in high income countries grew, this explanation could no longer be upheld. It shifted from individualistic to structural factors such as the forces in housing and labour markets (Busch-Geertsema Volker et al., 2010a). By the mid-1990s, a theory took hold that homelessness was an association of three factors, income insufficiency, lack of access to affordable housing and precipitation of at least one traumatic event, which explains why not all people meeting the first two criteria would become homeless. It is now considered, that reducing welfare spending is associated with rise in homelessness; however, this is modifiable through policy interventions (Busch-Geertsema Volker et al., 2010b).

Today’s understanding about pathways into homelessness are a dynamic interplay of four factors, lack of access to housing, economic factors such as insufficient income, interpersonal factors such as domestic violence and personal attributes such as criminal record or mental illness (Figure 1) (Fitzpatrick, 2005).

Figure 1: Causes of homelessness
Economic structures contributing to homelessness are the rising cost of living with insufficient income to match it, and rural-urban migration in hope of better prospects with or without exploitation. Housing related factors are lack of affordable housing, particularly closer to the city centre, and increase in housing prices due to gentrification and evictions. It is not uncommon that people under financial pressure choose to sleep rough in order to minimise housing expenditure and send more of their income home to their village. Individual factors contributing to the homelessness include various forms of addiction, old age, stigma against LGBT, lack of education and training, mental illness, chronic illness, prostitution and having a criminal record and past prison sentence. Interpersonal factors leading to homelessness are family breakdown, dysfunctional family history, family violence and abandonment (Speak and Tipple, 2006).

A study on homelessness in developing countries highlights that high-income country concepts are applied to developing countries where other circumstances may also be at play. While many homeless people are exploited, excluded and marginalised, it can also be empowering and bring opportunities. Homelessness may be chosen for a range of ‘balancing benefits’ such as safety from family violence or persecution; it can be economically empowering by accessing better employment in the city or to supplement income by saving accommodation cost (Speak, 2013). A similar view was expressed in a paper on homelessness and behavioural economics, where homelessness is seen as a “result of a series of choices made by humans acting in what they believe to be their best interests. Often these choices are made under severe duress” (Farrell, 2017). This helps us understand that not all homeless are poor or that not all poor people are homeless.

While in high-income countries homeless people are seen as socially isolated and experiencing social exclusion, in developing countries, it is not uncommon for homeless people to have strong social networks and form supportive communities or maintain strong links with the family network that supported them to travel to the city and that they may now support financially. Any approaches to reduce homelessness should not undermine this empowerment aspect (Speak, 2013).

Homeless people are not a homogeneous group and their pathways into homelessness are a complex web of causes that are highly individual. This has significant implications for intervention planning.
6  Importance of language & terminology

The language used to describe homeless people affects perception which in turn influences attitudes toward policy. Derogatory and exclusionary language contributes to stigmatisation and perception that homeless people violate social norms and offend public sensibilities (Speak and Tipple, 2006; Zufferey and Yu, 2018).

Negative perceptions are rooted in four key categories:

1. Homeless people are bad for business: Businesses that have homeless people near their premises feel that this negatively impacts on the competitiveness with other businesses.
2. Homeless people are undeserving of assistance: agencies and authorities may use language that portrays homeless or subgroups of homeless unworthy of help which in turn can be used as a rationale for limiting services for homeless and excluding them further (Neale, 1997).
3. Homeless people are portrayed as unkempt and dirty: Using such images of appearance serves as a rationale for rounding them up to improve a city’s image.
4. Homeless people deserve pity, charity and compassion: Even though the language is more sympathetic and compassionate, it portrays homeless as victims, helpless and in need of charity which undermines the potential for change.

These perceptions are barriers for policy and interventions that become self-reinforcing. For example, the notion that one needs to save homeless people, implies that they are incapable of changing their situation. Some intervention needs to be done to them, further disempowering the homeless.

In an environment of hostility, suspicion and apathy towards homeless people, there is a perception that the homeless are often criminals, the reality is that the homeless are often victims of crime such as theft and abuse (Speak and Tipple, 2006; Rusenko and Loh, 2015).

Speak and Tipple, (2006) argue that the media perpetuates the notion that the homeless are unemployed, beggars, drunks, criminals and socially inadequate. Interventions based on false perception may not be helpful, are likely to fail and can be victimising and harmful.

The public often perceives homeless people ranging from criminal, to beggar, mentally ill, immoral, transient, loner, helpless and non-citizen. A more value neutral terminology and portrayal of homeless people’s contribution to the local economy are likely to lead to a more empowering interventions and policy development. The language we use reflects the views on homeless people which is then translated into how the issue is approached.
7 Cost of homelessness

Homelessness also has a human cost and the distress of lacking a settled home can cause or intensify social isolation, create barriers to education, training and paid work and undermine mental and physical health. When homelessness becomes prolonged, or is repeatedly experienced, health and well-being further deteriorate which has associated costs (Pleace, 2015).

A recent study from Victoria, Australia calculated a cost of AUD$25,615 per homeless person per year covering health, crime, human capital and more making it much cheaper to provide last-resort housing than letting people sleep in the streets. Last-resort housing consists of legal rooming and boarding houses, emergency accommodation and transitional housing. It had a cost-benefit ratio of 2.7, meaning that for every $1 spent on housing rough sleepers, society would gain 2.70$ over a 20-year period. Cost benefit analyses help in making the case for more accommodation for homeless people (Guy Stayner, 2017).

In the United Kingdom, the annual cost of sleeping rough was calculated at £20,128 in comparison to a cost of £1,426 pounds of successful intervention (Pleace, 2015). An exploratory study found that after more than three months of homelessness the cost to government health services have been calculated at £4,298 per person, for mental health services at £2,099 per person and for those in contact with the criminal justice system at £11,991 per person (Pleace and Culhane, 2016). In the US, the Central Florida Commission on Homelessness, a charity, calculated that the average cost for providing housing for a chronically homeless person is about one third of the cost of incarceration or hospitalization (Economist, 2017). The cost of homelessness has also been calculated in other high-income countries also indicating that investment in reducing homeless is cost effective.

In Malaysia, a recent calculation by Agensi Inovasi Malaysia estimated the cost per homeless/per incident at MYR 2,955 for the running of shelters and welfare aids. Other intangible costs which are not included would result in a higher estimate (Agensi Inovasi, 2017, p.123). The examples of costing homelessness demonstrate that there is a significant cost to society. Where cost benefit analyses have been conducted, it seems that the intervention cost, particularly for housing is off set by the benefit. Cost benefit analyses for interventions aiming to reduce homelessness in Malaysia could be used to justify existing and new interventions.
8 Approaches to homelessness

Perceptions, values and views of homeless tend to influence the approach taken to tackle homelessness. Three different approaches are identified with varying levels of dignity and respect for the homeless person: a) deficit model, b) charity model, c) co-production model. A deficit model implies that a minority group is different from the majority group and deficient in important ways. In regards to homeless people, this deficiency may be social, mental or economical. When homeless people are perceived as unkempt, bad for business or undeserving, implying that homelessness is somehow their own fault, then the interventions are likely not to be participatory. On the contrary, they are likely to be actions done to the people such as raids, detention and further exclusion from housing and services.

If homeless people are seen as victims of circumstance, then a charity approach, seeking to save the homeless is applied. This can be seen in the many organisations and individuals providing food. This approach undervalues and does not strengthen the ability of homeless to help themselves. It may even be used to draw attention to the good deeds of the giver rather than an intervention to reduce homelessness.

Acknowledging a homeless person as a deserving individual that is in this situation due to the interplay of individual, social and structural factors may already be seen by the language used; for example, ‘homeless person’, instead of ‘the homeless’; ‘providing food’, instead of ‘feeding’. In a co-production model, the interventions are planned with homeless people and will be relevant to their needs. For example, in designing accommodation, input from homeless people may lead to more accepted designs.

Figure 2: Different service models with varying empowerment levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deficit model</th>
<th>Charity model</th>
<th>Co-production model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Done to the people</td>
<td>Done for the people</td>
<td>Done with the people</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key Points

- Homelessness is the outcome of a dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and actions and structural change
- Homelessness is a differentiated process with different routes and exits for different sub-populations.
- Homelessness for many is a temporary rather than permanent state.
- There is a critical lack of evidence about what works for specific subgroups and cultural and political contexts
- Lack of data including person specific data hinders prioritising services for those most at need and to measure effect of interventions.
HIGH-INCOME COUNTRY APPROACHES TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS

The latest report by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless, FEANTSA, highlighted that only two countries in Europe (Finland and most recently Norway) have seen a drop in homelessness and they are the two countries that address homelessness as a housing problem and a violation of fundamental rights rather than a social or personal problem. Rates of homeless people in other European countries experience constant fluctuation and currently are on the increase illustrating how complex it is to successfully tackle this issue.

Figure 3: Homelessness in Europe: an alarming picture

Source: Second overview of housing exclusion in Europe 2017 (Foundation Abbe Pierre and FEANTSA, 2017)

Analysing approaches taking by the different European countries, Finland and Norway stand out because they set up specific, measurable and realistic targets to be achieved in a predetermined timeframe and changed their systems of managing homelessness in a reactive and short term way to integrated systems for resolving and preventing homelessness in the long term. Analysis of the European and North American successful approaches identified four steps that need to be carried out simultaneous and on a partnership basis with all stakeholders (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2000; FEANTSA, 2018):

1. Planning of outcomes: collect quality local data, plan for specific goals
2. Close the front door: prevent homelessness across all social services
3. Open the back door: unconditional housing first
4. Build the infrastructure: fight systemic problems that cause extreme poverty through affordable housing, ensuring adequate income for a decent life, and change services to focus on users’ needs

One critical component in supporting homeless people leaving homelessness has been a shift to placing homeless in to permanent housing first. In the so called housing first model, the permanent housing is provided instead of shelters with any housing readiness conditions. Common issues such as alcoholism, mental illness, drug dependence, unemployment and others are addressed through individualised support services once the homeless person is in stable housing. This model is now used across developed countries and is effective as a sustainable exit strategy from homelessness but has only led to reductions in homelessness when implemented in combination with the other three components listed above.

The figure below illustrates the Housing first model and is followed by a table of programmes that are linked to housing first and have had positive outcomes.
Not all interventions lead to a reduction in homelessness. When Michael Bloomberg was Mayor of New York (2002-2013), homelessness increased by 80%. His critics noted that the increase was due to cutting provision of permanent housing, encouragement of gentrification and cutting eligibility to housing support for homeless families (Briggs, 2014).

Table 2: Promising international interventions reducing homelessness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Key Features</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing First (Finland)</td>
<td>• Permanent housing with needs-based services first open to all (incl. addicts etc.)&lt;br&gt;• Homeless people have rental agreements&lt;br&gt;• Housing provided as soon as possible&lt;br&gt;• No shelters&lt;br&gt;• Choice and self-determination&lt;br&gt;• Social integration&lt;br&gt;• National approach</td>
<td>2017 data: 10% reduction (neighbouring Denmark: 85% increase)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foyer Programme (Ireland)</td>
<td>• Target group of young people without family and at risk of homelessness&lt;br&gt;• Programme up to 2 years on education, life &amp; job skills&lt;br&gt;• Housing&lt;br&gt;• Well integrated&lt;br&gt;• Government led programme</td>
<td>Adopted by a number of other countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking Ground (USA)</td>
<td>• Social service NGO in New York (previously Common Ground)&lt;br&gt;• Target chronic homeless and homeless veterans (15% of homeless but consuming 50% of services)&lt;br&gt;• Permanent and transitional housing with on-site support services similar to the housing first model (no conditions to qualify for housing)&lt;br&gt;• Strong focus on dignity and connectedness&lt;br&gt;• Combined with building restoration, conservation and adaptive re-use of buildings to high environmental standards as part of neighbourhood revitalisation</td>
<td>Homelessness in Times Square reduced by 87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More information can be found in Appendix 2.

**LOW AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES APPROACHES TO REDUCE HOMELESSNESS**

Very little information is available on approaches in low and middle income countries highlighting a need for research and to develop and trial interventions.

In a study of nine developing countries, the interventions that were more successful were those that recognised homeless people’s needs, acknowledged their dignity and were managed through a collaboration of organisations (Speak and Tipple, 2006).

In India, the ‘Housing For All’ scheme is seeking to create affordable housing for all by 2022 mainly through private sector construction. There has been some criticism that this approach does not address underlying issues of social discrimination of marginalized groups (Hamad, 2017).

A couple of examples have been found from Mumbai:

1) homeless youth are trained as traffic wardens over 6 months and given uniforms; and 2) self-enumeration by people in very poor housing and homeless was presented by them to authorities leading to positive effects on their livelihoods including improved access to housing and loans (Patel, D ’Cruz and Burra, 2002). Many developing countries have given up providing well-built and small dwellings directly through public sector activity as authorities could not keep up with demand. However, providing quality and affordable housing is in line with the enabling approach advocated by international agencies since the 1990s (Tipple and Speak, 2006).
9 Malaysian policy context

In 2016, Malaysia was one of nearly 170 countries that adopted the United Nations’ New Urban Agenda. Two of its commitments related directly to homelessness:

1. “We will take positive measures to improve the living conditions of homeless people with a view of facilitating their full participation in society and to prevent and eliminate homelessness, as well as to combat and eliminate its criminalization.”
2. “We commit to promote national, sub-national, and local housing policies that support the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for all.”

The complete embedding of these commitments into Malaysian policy and practice is still to be realised.

11th Malaysia Plan

In the competitive cities’ section, homelessness and poverty reduction are mentioned in terms of the importance of ensuring inclusiveness and should be addressed through collaboration of relevant agencies, corporate bodies, NGOs, and local governments (EPU, 2015). Drivers for change in homelessness are linked to ‘affordable and quality housing accessible to targeted segments of the society’ and ‘local authorities as strategic drivers of local economic and social change’.

Government Transformation Programme (GTP)

The federal government’s GTP provides a roadmap to transform the country into a fully developed nation and an advanced, united and just society with high standards of living for all. One of its six key results areas is ‘raising living standards of low-income households’ which indirectly affects homelessness. One of the commitments was the funding for Anjung Singgah, a transitional home for the homeless in Kuala Lumpur. The funding commitment was renewed under GTP 2.0 (EPU, 2017).

Destitute Persons Act 1977

The Act has its roots in anti-vagrancy ordinances set up in the late 19th century by the British in Malaya and were applied to move beggars and poor people from public view through sentencing and fines. While begging and vagrancy are no longer crimes, resistance to government officers has been defined as a punishable offence under the Destitute Persons Act. It is a federal law and has been applied during operations (street raids) when ‘destitute persons’ (presumed homeless or begging) are taken into custody. Social welfare or local authority enforcement officers can then obtain a court order for involuntary admission to a state institution. Under this act, around 1300 persons were taken into custody each year between 2000 and 2009 (Kuala Lumpur Committee to Address Homelessness and Poverty, 2015).
Application and impact of the Destitute Person’s Act

Social Welfare data for 2011 identified disproportionately high numbers of mental health problems (44%), disabilities (16%), or chronic diseases (23%) in persons held in Desa Bina Diri facilities, shelter plus rehabilitation facilities outside of Kuala Lumpur. These issues are often direct contributing factors to homelessness and therefore not surprising. However, the main purpose of application of the Destitute Persons Act for forced removal remains to create a cleaner image of the city and support businesses. It does not support homeless people to manage their issues to be able to leave homelessness behind and so many of them return to their previous hang out locations. During this process it is also likely that they lose their IC card or any job they may have had leading to further exclusion and a perception of ‘them’ and ‘us’.

In 2017, a large operation was mounted to make Kuala Lumpur’s streets more slightly during the South-East Asia Games. Over 230 homeless people were forcibly removed and placed at a National Service Training Camp where they received a multi-week intervention programme called the Homeless Empowerment Programme. Programmes such as these can be viewed from two opposing perspectives: on the one hand a curbing of civil liberties and on the other the good intention of providing support and accommodation. Anecdotally and in the media, this particular programme has received some positive.

In 2014, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and Federal Territories Ministry discussed amending legislation to criminalise begging as it felt only a strong punitive approach would be deterrent enough and serve as a justification for the removal and detention of persons from public spaces. Also, other legislation is in place to curb organized begging. On the other side, there has been a call to repeal the Destitute Persons Act and/or create a homeless act outlining clear responsibilities and an empowering, solution focused, not a punitive approach (Abolish the Destitute Persons Act, 2014; Rusenko, 2014; Kuala Lumpur Committee to Address Homelessness and Poverty, 2015; Penang Institute, 2015; Rusenko and Loh, 2015).

A destitute person is:

a. any person found begging in a public place in such a way as to cause or be likely to cause annoyance to persons frequenting the place or otherwise to create a nuisance; or

b. any idle person found in a public place, whether or not he is begging, who has no visible means of subsistence or place of residence or is unable to give a satisfactory account of himself;

“begging” means any conduct calculated to induce the giving of alms, whether or not there is any pretence of singing, playing, performing, offering anything for sale or otherwise;

Source: (Destitute Persons Act 183, 1977)

DATA SOURCES/METHODOLOGY

Much has been written about the difficulty in collecting data on homeless people. Counts, as conducted in Kuala Lumpur City Council (DBKL) at homeless hot spots, provide a snapshot of stock data. Flow data is only available anecdotally from NGOs. Characteristics of the homeless, duration of homelessness and causes are captured by Kechara Soup Kitchen as a cumulative database. Other larger NGOs such as Pitstop also collect data. However, there is no rigorous system in place that can provide reliable stock and flow information for all of Klang Valley or other cities in Malaysia. Very few countries or cities have such a system which would be essential to accurately monitor the effect of any interventions or measure changes in inflows.

Even though there is little published research on homeless in Malaysia, feedback from homeless via NGOs is that they feel over-researched and hence are reluctant to participate. Ethical issues, privacy and access issue due to their transient nature all contribute to the lack of accurate and comprehensive data.

For this paper, data has been compiled using a small scale primary data collection and selected interviews in central Kuala Lumpur, a NGO database (Appendix 3: List of NGOs working with homeless people in Kuala Lumpur) based on one that used to be published on NGO Hub’s website and discussion with various government and non-government stakeholders. The book, “They took my shoes” provided further insight to personal accounts of homeless people (Soo and Yoon, 2017). A number of 2017 media stories published online in English provided further insights of issues and views held about homeless. The results are presented combining data sources around topics.

NUMBERS OF HOMELESS IN KUALA LUMPUR

A count by DBKL conducted in May 2017, identified 1037 homeless people including 15 children in 15 key hot spot zones. Around 90% of the counted homeless were male. In comparison to men, when women become destitute, they are more likely to return to family members or seek other types of shelter such as boarding houses are they are perceived safer than sleeping rough.
Table 3: DBKL Homeless people count in 15 Kuala Lumpur hot spot zones in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZON</th>
<th>KATEGORI</th>
<th>10 MEI 2017 / 02:00</th>
<th></th>
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<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,037</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DBKL, 2017

Figure 5: Distribution of homeless people along major roads

Source: DBKL, 2017
An exploratory count of homeless conducted by Think City in the heritage core in July 2017 found just over 300 homeless people. This is in line with the figure collected in relevant zones in the DBKL count.

**Figure 6: Think City homeless people count in downtown KL in 2017**

**DESCRIPTION OF HOMELESS PEOPLE IN KUALA LUMPUR BY LOCATION**

To learn more about homeless people in downtown Kuala Lumpur, Think City undertook an observational study walking the streets engaging with the homeless community. It found that each area in downtown KL has its own type of homeless people who look out for each other and form some friendship groups. The table below is representing a snapshot in time and is continually changing. Case studies of selected individuals are outlined in Appendix 4.
**Table 4: Homeless sub population by neighbourhood in downtown Kuala Lumpur**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Homeless sub population group (November 2017)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bangkok Bank &amp; Central Market</td>
<td>Observed: mix of older people (ca. 60+) including single women, majority Chinese; No evidence of intoxicated people but some young homeless people likely under the influence of drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Town, Jalan Sultan, Jalan Panggung</td>
<td>Observed: Young and old homeless people that appeared drunk, they tend to sleep during day (after drinking); The area provides opportunity for quick money through assisting drivers to park their cars and begging; Earnings appear to be spent in small alcohol shops in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segi College, Hang Lekiu</td>
<td>Perceived as a very safe area with community feel; Regular older homeless people help new homeless and look after them; Regular food distribution is available; Observed: a pregnant lady, older couples, mixed groups, homeless people appearing to be drug dependent seem to sell drugs here to fund their addiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chow Kit</td>
<td>24hour economy in the area; Young homeless people can find odd day jobs in markets and local businesses; Homeless people feel part of the community as they do not stand out from the local community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Homeless people in Kuala Lumpur are as diverse as in other places. The 2017 book ‘They took my shoes’ provides a number of personal accounts. Discussions with key informants and homeless people paints a picture of a variety of subgroups of homeless (Soo and Yoon, 2017).

Migrants from rural areas including East Malaysia are a large group. They arrive in Kuala Lumpur hoping to earn money to send back to their families. Many of them reported a background of family dysfunction. The city’s knowledge and hospitality based jobs often do not meet their skill set and there seems to be a lack of day labourer jobs. Past jobs in the informal economy are now less prominent.

Even if a job is found, exploitation by employers was reported by some leaving them with too little to live on. Other homeless people explained that they rather send earning to their families than spending it on relatively expensive accommodation. Among young, rural migrant men, a number rather stay in the city homeless than endure the shame of returning home and not being able to pay back money borrowed to travel to the city in the first place.

The issue of shame was also linked to homeless professional people. Entrepreneurs or business people whose business venture failed, did not want to face their family or have their marriage end as a result. This group is likely to be homeless for a shorter period of time.

Men and women with mental health, chronic diseases or addiction problems are a group of homeless people who are trapped in a vicious circle. Their condition may have caused them to lose their job, or the cost of treatment or their addiction increase their expenses significantly above their income level. Once homeless, obtaining medication, being able to store it safely and taking it regularly becomes extremely difficult leading to a deterioration in their health making it even more difficult to find work.
People with a criminal record and those with a served prison sentence are often homeless if they are not supported by their families. Even if they find work, they often lose it once their employer finds out about their history. Older people seem to be a growing group of homeless people. Abandoned by their family and/or suffering from chronic diseases, they would have difficulties finding work and earning sufficiently to rent a place.

People renting boarding houses to feel safer than sleeping on the streets may not be considered officially homeless. However, a larger proportion of women with children seem to use these in the Chow Kit area consuming a large portion of their income for very small cubicles often unsuitable and unsafe for inhabitation. It seems that even when offered alternative accommodation, people prefer to stay where their support networks, services and some employment are.

A dynamic interplay of economic, housing, individual and interpersonal factors create a pathway into homelessness. In Kuala Lumpur, as in other cities in developing countries, key factors are lack of affordable housing, rural urban migration and lack of skills for a growing knowledge and service economy. These are compounded through personal factors.

Homelessness is often temporary and there is a constant flow between being considered urban poor, mostly housed in PPR flats and being homeless. A 2018 study highlights how poverty affects children in housing for the urban poor (UNICEF, 2018). Without a new approach to preventing homelessness, the children of today will perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of poverty.

### Issues faced by homeless people in Kuala Lumpur

Results from an exploratory survey over one month in 2014 on begging found issues relevant to homelessness:

- Respondents faced difficulty in finding traditional work due to factors such as advanced age, incarceration history, disability or homelessness (or a combination)
- Begging was identified as a survival strategy of last resort
- Nearly 90% of respondents were Malaysian citizens
- Malaysian respondents were overwhelmingly male, over 50 years old, in poor health, and homeless
- One quarter of respondents had dependents, often parents, spouses, or children
- Over half of respondents had been victim to violent attacks or robbery
- Many were afraid of police and other authorities
- Over half of respondents had no contact with family, some were orphaned or abandoned
- 75% of respondents used neither drugs nor alcohol; of those who did, some did not do so daily
- Government institutions, such as Des Bina Diri, could be improved as they provided only food and shelter, but did not address root causes. Government assistance such as Bantuan OKU and Bantuan Orang Tua was viewed positively but did not sufficiently meet recipients’ economic needs
- Respondents were looking for lawful means to survive
- No evidence of involvement in organised crime was found in this study.

Source: (Rusenko and Loh, 2015)
SERVICES FOR HOMELESS
A variety of services are offered by government and non-government actors. Government services take a work first approach while many NGOs focus on providing food. The larger NGOs may use food distribution as a means to building a relationship with homeless people who can then be channeled in to other support services such as medical and dental care; distribution of clothing and personal hygiene products; job finding including skill development and CV writing; housing including loans/funding of deposits. These efforts are also supported through one off or regular corporate social responsibility initiatives or contributions by some private and government-led corporations.

The diagram below gives an overview of stakeholder groups and various levels. On the left, it shows operators at national level moving to state, city and centre level. Apart from government agencies, many NGOs and a UN agency are involved. A core group of government and non-government organisations has grown and meets regularly to discuss current issues.

Figure 7: Mayor Players across Malaysia and their Centres in Kuala Lumpur

Government centres and housing in Kuala Lumpur

Anjung Singgah
Anjung Singgah is a temporary shelter in the centre of Kuala Lumpur for adult Malaysians who have tested negative for drugs. The key aim of the centre is to support residents to find work within a two week stay which is often extended. However, such a ‘work first model’ that does not resolve or manage other underlying conditions such as health issues first, is unlikely to provide sustainable long-term solution.
**Pusat Transit Gelandangan**
There are two transit centres for homeless people. The older one at Medan Tuanku offers toilets, bathrooms, prayer rooms and is a food distribution point. The second centre was opened in early 2016. It is a three story building that can house up to 250 homeless people.

**Sekolah Bimbingan Jalinan Kasih**
A school for homeless children opened in Chow Kit in 2017 and enrolled around fifty children. These children are enrolled by parents but also proactively identified in the streets with the aim to break the issue of intergenerational homelessness and social disadvantage (Ram, 2015).

**Desa Bina Diri**
Desa Bina Diri (DBD) are shelters with rehabilitation for beggars and vagrants under the Welfare Department. Sungai Buloh DBD can house 200 people, other DBD facilities are located in Johor (Mersing), Pahang (Jerantut) and Sabah (Kota Kinabalu). The shelters provide food and lodging, counselling, recreational facilities, healthcare and practical training such as in agriculture, vocational skills and handicraft (The Star Online, 2014).

**Program Rumah Bimbingan**
A recent programme makes available 10 units in two low-cost public housing estates (PPR flats) to co-house four homeless people each. The units are rented for RM 30 per person per month. The tenants come from transit homes, are employed and have not history of mental illness or drug addiction.

**NGO services to homeless people in Kuala Lumpur**
There are many organisations and individuals seeking to help the homeless or hope to reduce homelessness. Their philosophy, level of professionalism, target group among the homeless and services can differ greatly. There is no official registration or quality framework making it difficult to coordinate activities, find gaps and avoid duplication. NGO Hub has attempted to collate a list on their website. The majority provide some sort of food distribution with or without added services. Some of the larger established NGOs are Kechara Soup Kitchen, Pit Stop Community Café, PERTIWI and Streetfeeders of KL.
Kechara Soup Kitchen
Kechara Soup Kitchen is a permanent soup kitchen serving 180 meals every weekday plus food distribution on weekends. It is a Buddhist organization with services reaching from homeless people to urban poor. It operates a food bank that is stocked with donations from TESCO and supplies 850 food parcels a week. Kechara also provides medical and counseling services and other support. Strong leadership, media profile and advocacy work make them one of the main players.

PERTIWI – Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam
PERTIWI is a long established NGO supporting women and children under leadership of Mdm Munirah Abdul Hamid and with funding from corporate and individual sponsors. In 2010, it launched a soup kitchen that is now providing food to around 800 people per week at a number of locations. Additional services and free medical assistance is also provided.
Pitstop Community Café
Pitstop Community Café is a social enterprise seeking to reduce homelessness, urban poverty and hunger. Six days a week, the Café reaches out to marginalised communities through food, mainly through its ‘pay what you can’ dinner service with the aim of re-integrating them into society. Once connected, it offers job training and placement including a culinary arts program for marginalised youth. A third focus in working with other soup kitchens and food banks to reduce food waste, redistributing food still fit for consumption.

Streetfeeders of KL
Streetfeeders of KL is a grassroots organization of mainly young professional people seeking to reintegrate homeless people back into society. Their food distribution to around 300 people per fortnight is a means to engage and build trust with homeless people.

Other NGOs
For a list of other NGOs refer to Appendix 3.

HOMELESS SHELTER DESIGNS
In 2014, PAM, the Malaysian Institute of Architects in partnership with DBKL held a design competition to develop innovative and sustainable temporary shelter for homeless people of Kuala Lumpur. The designs are still available but have not been realized. There is an opportunity to revisit these designs (PAM and DBKL, 2014).

SERVICE GAPS
Government and Non-government organisations provide a variety of services to homeless people. How much they meet the need of homeless people is difficult to assess. Services are usually designed to meet the need of a population. As there is very little reliable data on the homeless population, existing services may not meet the needs. There seems to be insufficient services for people with mental health and addiction issues and without stable housing, compliance with regular medication is almost impossible to achieve. While there are some temporary housing options, it seems that the change from unrestricted open air living to a tightly structured regime indoors may be too difficult for some to make.

Overall, the breadth of services available is quite wise ranging from housing and food to job skills, micro-loans, clothing and packs of toiletries and more. However, whether this services are sufficient in their variety and spatial distribution is difficult to say. Coordination could be improved and more detailed data on homeless people would be a prerequisite to more responsive service planning.
Summary

Current figures indicate that there are over 1000 homeless people in key hot zones in Kuala Lumpur and around 400 of those in the downtown area. Homeless people are considered those without shelter, sleeping rough and depending on their circumstance are seeking similar homeless people to share a specific area in town. A variety of NGOs, large and small, provide food on the most part but a whole suite of other services from medical and employment to distribution of clothes or finding housing.

Pathways into homelessness are varied, from economic and structural to individual and interpersonal factors. The government’s current work first model has not been able to significantly change the homelessness situation. Despite a number of well-meaning NGOs that provide a range of services responding to need, lack of coordination and registration reduces the impact NGOs as a whole could make.

Homelessness, particularly in developing countries are greatly under-researched and there is very little policy relevant or intervention-based research providing guidance. International case studies indicate that there are some critical components to interventions that have reduced homelessness. They are:

1. Close to real-time data on homeless numbers and individual profiles with two purposes: first, identify the most vulnerable and assist them first; and second, be able to measure programme effectiveness
2. Provide non-conditional housing first. With housing security, people can feel safe and focus on addressing their contributing issues such as mental health, addiction or unemployment through personalised support services. However, further research is needed to assess whether a subgroup of homeless in Malaysia that seem to prefer staying on the street, do in fact prefer to do so or if this view is a result of lack of affordable and innovative options that build on the strength of the relationships and peer support networks that groups of homeless have developed while living on the street
3. Social integration into a neighbourhood through work and volunteering and involvement in decision making can help homeless people build their skills and confidence to improve their situation
4. Some successful programmes are government led and rolled out nationally, others are NGO led with strong stakeholder engagement operating at local up to national level. There are hardly any published interventions conceived and run by homeless themselves.
5. Increasing gentrification in the city and reduction in welfare support may negatively influence the number of new homeless people as well as reduce the success of those seeking to leave homelessness behind.

Based on this study, a number of possible implementation challenges are highlighted and options for how they may be addressed are offered.
### Table 5: Anticipated challenge and mitigating approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Approach options</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Homeless people’s lack of trust in government agencies would hamper systematic collection of their personal data</strong></td>
<td>- For a coordinated data entry system of homeless, host this outside of government, for example NGO hub</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Access to and creation of new housing for homeless**                   | - Build on Federal Territory ministry’s co-housing programme  
- Explore micro-housing options  
- Develop an investment model into housing  
- Explore the ‘Breaking Ground’ initiative that combines restoration of old buildings with creation of affordable and homeless housing |
| **Wrap around services for the homeless**                                | - Assessment of skilled and available workforce amongst the homeless and services for them, particularly mental health workers  
- Innovative service models need to be developed                         |
| **Attitude towards homeless as failed individuals who may have caused their homelessness and deserve it, is counterproductive to the initiative** | - Extensive social marketing and capacity building is required to change this thinking. Early successes of the programme would also contribute. |
12 Roadmap forward

Homelessness exists in countries around the world and no universal solution has been found. On the contrary, in many countries, rates are rising, illustrating that homelessness is a complex and intractable problem, one that cannot be solved by conventional solutions, institutions operating in silos or fragmented civil society organisations.

Building on the information presented in this paper, a number of recommendations are proposed for various scales of implementation.

Key considerations are:

- **GATHER DATA**: Do we have sufficient information to devise relevant interventions and measure their impact?
- **PRIORITISING SERVICES**: How do we identify those most at risk of dying on the streets and connect them with necessary services?
- **PARTICIPATION**: How can homeless people participate in a meaningful way planning services and interventions?
- **EFFECTIVENESS**: Is the action likely to reduce homelessness or minimize the harmful effects of homelessness on individuals?
- **QUICK WINS**: Are there groups of homeless people who with minimal intervention could help supported to leave homelessness?
- **EXPERIMENT**: With very little evidence, what well-evaluated experiments could be set up to as an initial step finding interventions that achieve intended outcomes?
- **COLLABORATE**: Given that each profession, stakeholder and sector views the issue only from their perspective, can this intractable problem of homelessness be solved through collaborative efforts, mapping and addressing the interrelated variables influencing homelessness?
- **CREATE A SENSE OF URGENCY**: How do we make homelessness a priority?

**STREET-LEVEL / NEIGHBOURHOOD-LEVEL ACTIONS**

1. Set up a **neighbourhood network** of stakeholders involved with homeless people but also the business community to coordinate individual activities, collaborate on joint initiatives, create new local solutions. Initiatives would focus either on supporting people out of homelessness or minimizing detrimental its effects.
2. A group of interested stakeholders to conduct a **registry week** to get to know each homeless person by name, their pathway into homelessness and current issues. This will help in identifying relevant services required by homeless people in that area and establish a personal connection. By person data will also help measure impact of any initiatives (Links with Community Solutions, an NGO in the US have been established to support this endeavor).
3. Due to the complex nature of homelessness, set up **small scale experiments** that are based on the information collected from the local homeless community and is designed in a **participatory** process. Initiatives proven successful can then be scaled up.
4. Identify **housing options** in the local neighbourhood or connection to PPR housing initiative (Program Rumah Binbim gan)
5. Connect initiatives in Kuala Lumpur’s heritage core to the **Safe City** programmes by Think City and LA21 as homelessness is seen by the business community as a safety issue.
CITY-LEVEL ACTIONS

6. Maintain and expand the networking of NGOs and local government that meets regularly already. Building a strong vision and commitment to tackle this issue through policy, research and workforce development.

7. Strengthen the collaboration and coordination efforts that exist already among a group of NGOs and supported by NGO Hub.

8. Adapt the housing first model to the Kuala Lumpur context: this could include one or more specific larger buildings adapted for reuse as permanent housing plus on-site services; or it may be looking at smaller buildings or individual units through public private partnerships that could be transformed into affordable housing and linked to existing services nearby.


10. Build on existing and investigate new sustained Corporate Social Responsibility partnerships between Corporations and a specific neighbourhood or NGO.

STATE/NATIONAL-LEVEL ACTIONS

11. As the policy context is shaping interventions, developing a Homelessness Act would provide clearer direction, role delineation and responsibility for various actors on how to address homelessness.

12. In the meantime, strengthen existing coordination and collaboration between state and national government actors involved with homeless people and considering a stronger focus on prevention.

13. Address the lack of research and Malaysian specific services models through initiatives such as a government grant funding scheme on homelessness, setting up of research networks, hosting regional or international conferences, setting up bodies like the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness or FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless.
References


Foundation Abbe Pierre and FEANTSA (2017) Second overview of housing exclusion in Europe 2017. Available at:


APPENDIX 1: Definitions of Homelessness

**Absolute**: Those living on the street with no physical shelter of their own, including those who spend their nights in emergency shelters.

**At-Risk of Homelessness**: A person or family that is experiencing difficulty maintaining their housing and has no alternatives for obtaining subsequent housing. Circumstances that often contribute to becoming at-risk of homelessness include: eviction, loss of income, unaffordable increase in the cost of housing, discharge from an institution without subsequent housing in place, irreparable damage or deterioration to residences, and fleeing from family violence.

**Chronic**: Those who have either been continuously homeless for a year or more, or have had at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years. In order to be considered chronically homeless, a person must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in an emergency homeless shelter.

**Disabling Condition**: A diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions. A disabling condition limits an individual's ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living.

**Episodic/cyclical**: A person who is homeless for less than a year and has fewer than four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

**Family Unit**: Those who are homeless and are: parents with minor children; adults with legal custody of children; a couple in which one person is pregnant; multi-generational families; part of an adult interdependent partnership. Many members of this group are women fleeing abusive domestic situations and struggling to re-establish independent homes for themselves and their children.

**Homeless**: Those who do not have safe, affordable, appropriate, permanent housing to which they can return whenever they choose.

**Housing First**: Adopting a Housing First approach means that permanent housing is provided along with needed support services. Support services may include intensive medical, psychiatric and case management services including life skills training, landlord liaison assistance and addictions counselling. Addressing these needs through support services helps people maintain their housing over the long term.

**Relative**: Those living in spaces that do not meet the basic health and safety standards including protection from the elements; access to safe water and sanitation; security of tenure and personal safety; affordability; access to employment, education and health care; and the provision of minimum space to avoid overcrowding.

**Wrap around supports**: Wrap around supports are services that help address a homeless individual’s underlying causes of homelessness. These support services include medical and psychiatric case management, life skills training, landlord liaison assistance, and addictions counselling.

Source: Human Services Canada (http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/homelessness/14630.html)
APPENDIX 2: International homelessness interventions

**Housing First (Finland)**

Finland is the only country in Europe that can demonstrate a reduction in homelessness. For the past 10 years, the country has invested in providing affordable housing with the goal to end rather than manage homelessness. Their Housing First approach offers permanent housing and needs-based support instead of temporary shelter or hostel accommodation to homeless people as soon as they become known to the service.

Priority is given to moving homeless straight from the street into permanent housing, not a shelter and without housing readiness conditions. Other issues such as alcoholism, mental illness, drug addiction, unemployment and others are addressed once the homeless person is in stable housing and through individualised supports. Before then, most housing services had made it a prerequisite to deal with these personal issues first. Other principles include choice and self-determination by the homeless person and social and community integration (Briggs, 2014).

Housing First is a national not a local approach. The state provides funding for flats and services to local authorities, an incentive to implement the programme. It is managed by the Y-Foundation which operates 16,300 low cost flats. Tenants pay rent and are entitled to benefits and depending on income may contribute to the cost of services. The idea behind this programme is that stable living conditions enable use of mainstream services instead of more expensive emergency services (Foster, 2017).

One of the challenges implementing the programme was acceptance by NGOs of the unconditional housing. This presented a different set of values than the testing for eligibility first. Housing First programmes or its principles are applied in a number of countries, mainly Europe and North America. In New Orleans, for example, a 85% reduction of homelessness was achieved through housing provision (Economist, 2017).

**Foyer Programme (Ireland)**

The Foyer Programme targets young people without family and at risk of homelessness for a duration of 18 to 24 months and provides housing, job skills/employment, educational support and life skills training. It stands out due to its well-integrated nature and has been adopted by a number of other countries including Canada, Australia and the US. Assessing its effectiveness based on existing evaluation studies of the Foyer programme and its off-shoots has highlighted the lack of rigorous evaluation and research design (Levin et al., 2015).

**Breaking Ground (formerly Common Ground)**

Breaking Ground, formerly known as Common Ground, is a social services NGO in New York founded by Rosanne Haggerty in 1990 with the aim of providing permanent and transitional supported housing rather than short term shelter housing for the homeless. It is based on the Housing First philosophy that people who have stable housing are much more likely to tackle other issues they face. While the Finnish Housing First programme is aiming to house homeless as soon as possible, Breaking Ground prioritises chronic homeless. This group makes up only 15% of the homeless in the US but consume 50% of resources. Other priority groups are veterans, older people and young people (Breaking Ground plus Foyer programme).
Breaking Ground’s approach enables homeless individuals to overcome the complex challenges posed by mental illness, substance abuse, past trauma, and other barriers to stability by:

**Providing safe, permanent homes without conditions.** Clients are not obligated to complete a rehabilitation program, attain sobriety, or meet any other preconditions before moving into housing.

**Fostering a supportive environment focused on connectedness.** On-site services address essential health, mental health, and occupational needs, while also creating opportunities for socializing, recreation, and community connectedness. Providing beautiful small apartments conveys the notion that homeless deserve a home and it restores their dignity and feeling of pride.

**Transforming individuals, buildings and neighborhoods:** At its inception, Breaking Ground restored the Times Square Hotel in Manhattan, converting a dilapidated and crime-ridden building into vibrant, affordable housing with on-site clinical and employment services for residents. This restoration helped catalyze the revitalization of the Times Square neighborhood and introduced a new, results-oriented approach to addressing homelessness. The Times Square residence has been replicated elsewhere in New York City, as well as in cities throughout the country and internationally. Since 2005, all of developments are designed to be LEED or Enterprise Green-Certified and feature sustainable design elements, including low-toxicity paints and materials to protect indoor air quality, increased natural light, energy-efficient heating and lighting systems, and green roofs.

Initially, Breaking Ground buildings received their tenants through referral from emergency shelters. As this did not reduce the number of rough sleepers in the street, the programme developed an in-depth data collection system of homeless resulting in a personal vulnerability score. Just like the triage system in hospitals, the priority for housing is given to those with the highest vulnerability (of dying in the streets).

The annual cost to provide a single adult with supportive housing is $24,190, or less than half the cost of providing emergency, inpatient, and other crisis services to an unhoused individual with mental illness. The programme has housed over 2,200 people and reduced street homelessness in Times Square by 87% (Rosanne Haggerty, 2007, Breaking Ground, no date; Fessler, 2011; Bindeglass, 2015).

**‘Community Solutions’ programme: Built for Zero**

Community Solutions is an NGO also created by Rosanne Haggerty. The difference to her previous Breaking Ground initiative is that the focus here is on system change and scaling of the programme across the US with outreach internationally. This national effort supports participants in developing real time data on homelessness, optimizing local housing resources, tracking progress against monthly goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies.

The key objectives are:

- Helping communities adopt proven best practices, deploy existing resources more efficiently, and use real-time data to improve performance
- Implementing transparent data and performance management for real-time improvement
- Engaging leadership from the government, private and philanthropic sectors in securing new resources for communities and removing policy roadblocks
- Connecting communities to one another through an online platform for innovation, knowledge capture and group problem solving

**Built for Zero: the success rests on four critical interventions:**

1. permanent supportive housing (not shelters)
2. rapid rehousing (aim: within 10 days of becoming homeless);
3. a Housing First approach (Housing plus individualized support services for issues such as alcohol, drugs, mental illness);
4. and not criminalizing people experiencing homelessness (e.g. Such as laws against sleeping or eating in public)

A 100,000 Homes Campaign ran across 186 cities, counties and state during 2010-2014 and succeeded in placing 100,000 homeless Americans. (Briggs, 2014). The two objectives were to register all homeless people and move 2.5 per cent of the chronic and vulnerable homeless population into permanent housing each month (Leopold and Ho, 2015).

While the campaign succeeded in increasing a feeling of urgency to address homelessness, policy change was less evident, particularly in regards to removing barriers to placing people with drug addiction or criminal records into permanent housing. The evaluation of the campaign also showed that the system for assessing housing needs and helping match people to the most appropriate available housing resource was not fully implemented. The campaign was also less successful in towns that had low functioning homeless service systems and lacked the infrastructure or the leadership to apply the lessons of the Campaign. (Leopold & Ho, 2015)

Community Solutions Approach

- **Focus on the outliers** – those people or neighbourhoods most likely to fall through the cracks of existing social welfare programs – to build better solutions for everyone
- **Set measurable, public, time-bound goals** to build a sense a of urgency and force key players to innovate
- **Engage the user** - those trapped in poverty, along with frontline health and human services workers- to design more practical, better informed solutions
- **Optimize existing resources** by using all available data to inform decisions about spending and community responses to need
- **Test and evaluate new ideas in short cycles** to learn what works quickly and build on successful strategies
APPENDIX 3: List of NGOs operating in Kuala Lumpur

The following list has been compiled in September 2017. Particularly smaller NGOs operate only for a limited time. Therefore, this list should be interpreted as a snapshot in time, not as a comprehensive and current listing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NGO Hub Asia</td>
<td>Platform developed by SOLS 24/7 and 7-Eleven, for NGOs and individuals to find resources (grants, etc) for development and growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLS 24/7</td>
<td>Award-winning humanitarian organization, committed to empowering underserved communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Soup Kitchens</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baitul Fiqh</td>
<td>Started in 2005 to help the homeless, teen girls, and other groups in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Excel Services</td>
<td>A Christian non-profit charitable organisation. Through Street Ministry and Foodbank, helps the homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeding the Needy</td>
<td>Provides food to the needy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kechara Soup Kitchen</td>
<td>Founded in 2006, by students of Rinpoche. It is non-religious and non-discriminatory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kembara Kitchen</td>
<td>Volunteer catering group that raises funds through catering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasi Lemak Project - youth volunteers</td>
<td>Founded in 2013 by IIUM students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Feed the Need</td>
<td>Founded in 2013, a community-run initiative to provide one meal every Thursday to the less fortunate in KL.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERTIWI (Pertubuhan Tindakan Wanita Islam)</td>
<td>Formed in 1967, and played various roles. Mobile soup kitchen started in 2010 to provide means to the hard-core poor and homeless people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PitStop Community Café</td>
<td>Social enterprise founded by Joecelyn Lim to assist marginalised communities with the aim of reintegrating into society, minimise food waste, and provide a platform for volunteering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Feeders KL</td>
<td>Started in 2011, by a group headed by Gary Liew.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mustard Seed Soup Kitchen</td>
<td>Founded in Jan 2016. Mustard Seed Soup Kitchen is a community initiative which aims to provide meals for the homeless, urban poor and underprivileged homes in Klang Valley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Bank Malaysia</td>
<td>Redistributing excess food to the needy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Other Food Services Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast for Homeless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring Hearts</td>
<td>Humanitarian charity to help those in need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dapur J’07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dapur Jalanan KL</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empire Project</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends of Vihara</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Global Street Mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Community Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy Caring Hearts Crew</td>
<td>Small group of friends, founded in 2014.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICareBearz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KASEH4U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KL Sikh Community Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesgone Feed the Homeless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lions Club of KL</td>
<td>Started Feed the Needy (see above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love Joy Association</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Misi Sedekah Jumaat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projek Aqua</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shepherd Street</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gagaks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unggas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viva Starfish Project</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We Love Charity</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Other Service Providers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>About</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buku Jalanan Chow Kit</td>
<td>Free education for children and working poor of Chow Kit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CarinMed</td>
<td>Tech start-up focused on easy capture of patient data in any situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedai Jalanan UM</td>
<td>Monthly pop-up store in Jalan Panggong (established in 2015) of donated goods for the needy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and Respect Transformation Centre</td>
<td>Founded by Zeal, formerly homeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mak Minah Project</td>
<td>Social enterprise founded in 2014 to help the urban poor. Also provides micro-loans for housing deposits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers Unite (Teddy Mobile Clinic)</td>
<td>Platform for people to volunteer. Teddy Mobile clinic is one of the initiatives under this, providing medical assistance to street clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow House</td>
<td>Multi-project volunteer organisation in KL, focusing on a variety of issues. Has several capacity building programmes for street clients.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4: Homeless Interviews

Homeless observations during a three-night walk on the streets in central Kuala Lumpur:

- Some of them have formed strong communities, looking out for each other’s wellbeing and belongings.
- 2 children were observed with an adult female, but soon disappeared. We were told families were often in hiding or ready to flee because they were expecting raids (due to SEA games).
- During our observation, a group dropped off donated clothes. Sergeant made sure it was collected in an orderly fashion. Lots of clothes remained, unneeded or unsuitable. It was put neatly in a corner. It is possible, that the remainder may be sold at Pasar Karat.
- A man came to offer a security job to the homeless people, but no one wanted it. When we asked the man for details, he did not answer. The homeless people told us later that some people come offering jobs, but exploit them. Some do not get paid in full, or get drugs instead of money.

2017 interviews with homeless people in Central Kuala Lumpur

Greg is in his 50’s. We met him near Bangkok Bank. He is from Ipoh and has been in KL for 30 years of which he spent 15 as a homeless person. He speaks English and Malay has he has worked as a labourer in Port Klang. Currently he does some odd jobs, mainly helping with moving and makes around 700 MYR per month. His IC was stolen while he was asleep. When asked what would help him, he said some platform that would help him find work.

Firdaus is in his late 50s to early 60’s. We talked to him near Bangkok Bank. He was born in Indonesia and has lived in Malaysia for over 30 years. He has been homeless and jobless for two years and suffers from mental health issues. We also noted that two alcohol bottles were standing behind him. To improve his situation, he would like more money to buy cigarettes and food.

Matthew is in his 30s. We spoke with him at Hang Lekiu homeless community, not far from Raja Chulan where he stays with his wife. He is from Johor Bahru, and has four children which are staying with his mother. He has been homeless for 15 years and works as a promoter. We had a clear and coherent conversation on current events. He is seen as a ‘leader’ of a small group of homeless people. The couple’s income is around 3000 MYR which they send home for their children. He told us that couples with children are not that welcome in this particular area as it attracts visits from JKM (Welfare Department). There is also a feeling that parents must take care of their children and not allow them to live on the streets. His suggestion for improvement was to priorities allocation of PPR flats to homeless couples and families.

Jai is around 20 years old and part of the Hang Lekiu homeless group near Segi College. He has been homeless for one year. He comes from Terengganu and is the seventh of nine children. He came to Kuala Lumpur with a job in housekeeping in a hotel. Of his salary of 1600 MYR, 500 was taken by a middleman, so he left. Now he is jobless and we suspect he may be taking some drugs. He has a sister in Kuala Lumpur but prefers not to live with her. He would like support to find work.

The ‘Sergeant’ is in his 60s and originally from Johor Bahru. He acts like a sergeant, is strict and looks out for the young ones. We met him near Segi College as part of the Hang Lekiu homeless group. He says he has mental health issues and is also very sharp and speaks English and Bahasa Melayu well.
Melody is in her 30s. We speak to her near Segi College at the Hang Lekiu homeless group. She has been on the streets for three years and worked at a department store in a new mall near KLCC. She earns around 1200 MYR per month and sends this back to her family. She feels with a higher salary, life would be more affordable in the city.

Jason is in his 30s. We meet him at the Hang Lekiu homeless group near Segi College. He is from Sarawak and learned welding at a Technical College. He has lost his IC three times and has not replaced it due to a fine of 1000 MYR.

‘Sabah boy’ is in his 20s and we speak with him at the Hang Lekiu homeless group near Segi College. His name gives away his origin. He lost money gambling in Singapore and came to Kuala Lumpur eighteen months ago. He speaks English and Bahasa Melayu.

Ahmed is in his 50s. He says he is not homeless but collects plastic bottles and other things during the night. We spoke with him on Hang Lekiu and he told us he is from Syria and has been in Kuala Lumpur for six years. He lives in Jalan Pudu in a small rented room. He speaks Arabic and English.