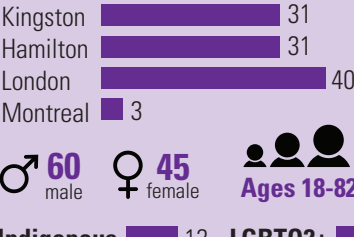


# What is the EXPERIENCE AND IMPACT OF BOREDOM during and following homelessness?

We interviewed three groups in four cities (Kingston, London, Hamilton and Montreal)



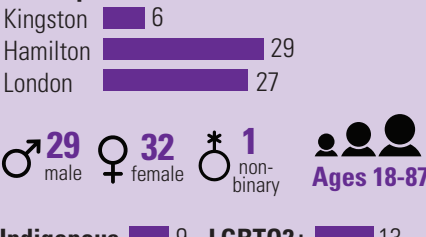
Individuals who were **unhoused** (105 total)



**Unhoused 1-12 months**  
(45% primarily unsheltered, 55% primarily sheltered)



Individuals **housed after homelessness** (62 total)



**Housed 1-21 months**



Social service and mental health **service providers** (20 total)



## What did we find?

### Quantitative Findings

We compared the **unhoused** and **recently housed** participants with participants in other studies and found:

Compared with these other groups, participants reported:

- ↑ increased boredom
- ↓ decreased meaningful activity
- ↓ lower mental well-being
- ↓ lower community belonging
- low to moderate alcohol/drug use



Participants with high levels of boredom reported:

- ↑ more drug use
- ↑ greater hopelessness
- ↓ lower mental well-being



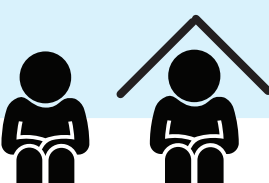
Engagement in meaningful activity was associated with:

- ↑ Greater mental well-being
- ↑ More time spent in the community
- ↓ Lower levels of drug use

When we compared participants who were unhoused with participants who were housed after homelessness, we found that:

That there were no differences in:

- ≠ boredom
- ≠ meaningful activity engagement
- ≠ hopelessness
- ≠ mental well-being
- ≠ alcohol use
- ≠ drug use
- ≠ community integration (both spending time in the community and having a sense of community belonging)



**These findings show that:**

- Housing alone doesn't necessarily improve psychosocial well-being.** Hopelessness, boredom, and substance use were just as high in recently housed individuals as in those who remained unhoused.
- There were **no statistically important differences** between individuals who had been recently housed, and those who remained unhoused on measures of mental well-being, community integration, or engagement in meaningful activities.

### Qualitative Findings

Individuals who were unhoused identified that **boredom was a central feature** of their experience of homelessness, and imposed a negative influence on mental health.

Participants indicated that they were:

*"...bored til lunch, bored til dinner, and bored til bed"*

Shawn, unhoused, London

Boredom was related to psychosocial difficulties that participants experienced:

*"Boredom is anxiety. Boredom is depression"*

Susan, unhoused, Kingston

During periods of boredom, they described reliving past traumas that they had experienced, and this led to the desire to use substances to cope:

*"For me, I just wanna use mostly when I start thinking of bad things. I start thinking of my kids, and I can't stop those thoughts...so I need something to kind of distract"*

Peanut, unhoused, Kingston

Individuals who were housed following homelessness similarly described boredom as central to their experience. At times, they described feeling it more deeply once they were housed.

*"Because my place is so quiet, it feels like I'm the only one who's experienced such hollowness"*

Sandy, housed, Hamilton

Service providers recognized that boredom is a **serious issue influencing the mental health** of individuals who experience homelessness.

Service providers emphasized the importance of meaningful activities for promoting mental health:

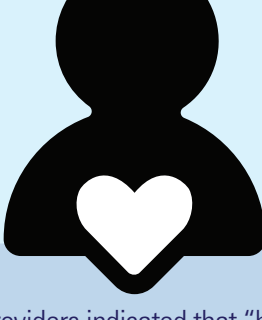
*"humans need meaning and purpose in our lives just to have any sense of who we are"*

Service Provider 2, London

Service providers indicated that the environments in which individuals are situated both *during and following homelessness* provide little opportunity to engage in meaningful activity to address the boredom that they experience:

*"there's nowhere to go, and there's nothing to do"*

Service Provider 4, London



Service Providers indicated that "housing is a shell...that you could potentially flourish in" [Service Provider 2, London]. They indicated that this doesn't always happen for individuals who have left homelessness, with many who are housed that feel under-occupied and isolated from others: "The novelty of being housed wears off...and they have that loneliness" [Service Provider 5, Kingston] and "a lot of people go downhill after being housed" [Service Provider 3, Kingston]

Though service providers recognized that boredom was a serious issue, they reported feeling trapped in a system that prevented them from addressing more than supporting individuals to secure housing. Attending to crises and working within a system with limited resources prevented them from focusing on helping people to find ways to occupy their time in meaningful ways.

## What do our findings mean?

**Boredom is a serious issue**

among individuals who experience homelessness, and one that doesn't resolve on its own once a person is housed

**Boredom has strong associations with mental health, community integration and substance use**

and needs to be addressed to promote the well-being of individuals with experiences of homelessness

**Community initiatives**

that engage individuals with experiences of homelessness in meaningful activity are needed

**The way that systems are structured:**

1. Limit opportunities for individuals who experience homelessness to engage in meaningful activity, leading to boredom;
- and
2. Prevent service providers from supporting this population to effectively engage in meaningful activity

## What can we do next?

1

Collectively, we need to change systems to: **1) Address factors that limit engagement of individuals who experience homelessness in meaningful activity;** and **2) Support access to integrated health and social services and access to service providers who can engage people in meaningful activity including employment, education, training, and leisure.**

2

Our team will **share these findings with individuals with lived experiences of homelessness, service providers, and policy makers in all levels of government and within health and social care organizations** to draw attention to the impact that boredom can impose on the mental health of individuals who experience homelessness.

3

Researchers and service providers may consider **partnering with individuals with lived experience on developing evidence-based approaches** that can be used to support individuals to engage in meaningful activity during and following homelessness.

4

We need to know more about **effective approaches** for engaging individuals who experience homelessness in meaningful activity.

## Who to contact for questions about this study?

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