Homeless Myths Debunked by Sussex Research

Censuses taken in Brighton since 1991 testify that there can be up to 66 people sleeping rough on any one night in the town, often concentrated in small areas. These figures ensure that Brighton often ranks as having the highest number of homeless people per capita in the UK. Thanks to research by geographer Jon May, who's based in CCS, some of the myths which arise as a result have now been shattered.

Jon debunked widely-held assumptions about the lives of homeless people in Brighton with an exhaustive survey of their housing histories. "There has never been such an in-depth study of these processes before. This is the first time we've had a complete set of housing histories for homeless people," he says.

The flagstone of the research - entitled the Homeless Histories Project, and funded by CCS - was a unique data-collection system developed by Jon. He filled in a form for each night his respondents had been homeless, detailing the location - whether it was rough sleeping, a friend's floor or a hostel - and the length of stay. Some people filled in as few as three of these forms, some as many as 100. As Jon explains: "From these histories you can trace exactly when, how often and for how long someone has been homeless, how much they've moved around and where they've been moving to, and what sort of accommodation they have been staying in."

Most research into homelessness only concentrates on people's experience of living rough in the present. Because Jon May's research builds up a complete picture of people's past experiences, it gives an insight into what really happens over a period of time. Contrary to popular expectations, people who become homeless once, or even several times, do not become entangled in a spiral of long-term homelessness, drug addiction, alcoholism and crime.

Jon discovered that whilst around 16% of the sample were long-term homeless, by far the vast majority - around two-thirds of the sample - were 'episodically' homeless. These people had been homeless more than once, and often several times, in their lives, but they had also had periods of employment and secure housing in between, sometimes for many years. According to Jon, "Episodic homelessness doesn't seem to be developing into permanent homelessness. The two groups appear to be very distinct."

Drug use, alcoholism and mental health problems are also rare among the episodically homeless. Only 10% of the episodically homeless in the sample were alcoholics or drug users. According to Jon, the assumption that all homeless people have these social problems, and so are culprits in their own downfall, lets the real culprits off the hook. He argues that the real causes of homelessness are poverty and unemployment.

Dark Matter from Red Earth hits Sussex

Brighton-based performance group Red Earth is set to wow the Festival crowds this weekend with a spectacular installation piece, Dark Matter. The work, an audacious attempt to cross the barriers of what we expect from 'performance' art, has been hailed as the likely centrepiece of the Festival. Involving ambient music, atmospheric lighting and the liberal use of fire, the piece will be performed in Stammer Park.

Creators Simon Pascoe and Caitlin Easterby are both alumni of Sussex, and both developed an interest in the arts during their time here as students. English graduate Caitlin was playing Titania in a SUDS production of A Midsummer Night's Dream when she met Simon, who was playing Oberon. The two formed a theatre company called Bright Red with other SUDS members after leaving the University.

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Careers in Tandem

Sussex boasted another first last month with the granting of professorships to John and Charles Abraham. Brothers John and Charles are the first siblings to be made professors at Sussex. Charles was appointed professor of Psychology in December 1998 and John’s appointment as professor of Sociology followed the most recent meeting of Senate. The brothers are based in SOC. Amazingly, they were both undergraduates at Sussex too, with John gaining a BSc in Mathematics in 1983 and going on to study for an MSc in Science, Technology and Industrialisation and an MA in Sociology. He completed his DPhil on the Political Sociology of Medicine in 1992. Charles graduated in 1978 with a degree in Social Psychology, finishing his doctorate on Attribution Theory in 1982. The brothers will soon be co-directors of a Centre for the study of health-related policy and behaviour, which they are currently in the process of setting up.

Charles’ research focuses on the field of health-related behaviour, studying people’s attitudes to health and illness and their willingness to take action to protect their health. He has worked on a sex education teaching package for 14-16 year olds. John works in a similar area, concentrating on the regulation of medicines and the pharmaceutical industry. John’s best known work is his 1995 book on science, politics and the pharmaceutical industry. Another book on the safety of sleeping pills is in the pipeline.

Inspired by the Sussex set-up, John says ’The University must have one of the most beautiful campuses in the country. It also has a really nice mix of research centres and teaching schools. The research institutions really complement the main schools.’ Charles previously worked at Ninewells Medical School at the University of Dundee and was attracted back to Sussex by the setting up of a large social psychology group with a special interest in health.

The brothers are very fond of each other. John says ’We get on really well, which is just as well when we live and work in the same place.’

Dark Matter from Red Earth
hits Sussex

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According to Simon though, ”We’ve moved a long way from the sorts of things we did with SUDS. We’ve turned away from narrative pieces and towards trying to create moments of sublimation...we hope that rather than merely suspending disbelief, like traditional theatre, we will be suspending reality.”

Dark Matter aims to probe the relationship between alchemy and modern physics. Simon is struck by the similarity between modern astronomy’s lack of knowledge about what constitutes the ‘dark matter’ of the universe, and the medieval alchemists’ belief that the universe was created from an unknowable ‘dark source’. The production, which will involve three performers, two technicians and two musicians, is set to be visually spectacular whatever your interpretation of the theme. Simon says “There is a pure visceral thrill to be had from bringing together all these materials. We are experimenting, and we are inviting the audience to experiment with us. It’s a multi-sensory experience which transcends all normal preconceptions of performance. And it’s a non-dangerous way of experiencing something really trippy.”

Dark Matter will be performed from 14 - 16 May in Stanmer Park. Meet at the Gardner Arts Centre at 9.15pm.

Sir William McCrea

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Emeritus Professor Sir William McCrea, FR S, at the age of 94. Sir William was the founder of the Astronomy Centre in 1966 and held Chairs in mathematics at Belfast and London before coming to Sussex. He was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1976. A memorial service will be held in the Meeting House at 2.30 pm on Tuesday 22 June. All who knew Sir William are invited to come and join his family in a celebration of his life.

New Faces

Thamy Ayouch

Lecturer in French

Thamy Ayouch joins Sussex as a Lecturer in French on a one year exchange programme from the ‘Ecole Normale Superieure’. Thamy is originally from Morocco but has studied in France for six years. He completed two Masters last year, because he couldn’t make up his mind what to study, so decided to do both philosophy and British literature.

Thamy’s teaching here focuses on literature; the aim being to enable his students to develop a critical attitude to literature and the tools necessary for literary analysis. In contrast Thamy has set up a French Poetry club which is simply for pleasure - ’I like poetry and want to share it with people.’

Thamy’s PhD is a comparative study of phenomenology and psychoanalysis. He thinks it great that students can join seminars on any topic they choose and has even attended a few on French Modern Thought himself. He believes Sussex to be unique in its approach to philosophy because here it is tackled by lecturers from greatly differing backgrounds such as literature or sociology, whereas in France it would only be taught by philosophy lecturers.

While here in Brighton Thamy is enjoying a busy time socialising and loves discussion. He is also learning to Salsa dance. However, Thamy may have to give this up when he returns to France as he will have to start studying for his teaching exams which he fears will lead to a ’very monkish life.’
Back-to-School Students Celebrate Success

Students were invited to give themselves a pat on the back at the recent Tutoring and Mentoring Award Ceremony. A celebration of the students' achievement, the ceremony recognised all the hard work that the tutors and mentors ploughed into the scheme. Vice Chancellor, Alasdair Smith, and Student Development Officer, Lilla Funge, were both there to congratulate everyone involved.

The University has been encouraging students sturdy enough to tackle the task to be tutors or mentors in local schools since 1994. Around 100 students took part in the scheme this year, with the vast majority acting as tutors. Each participant committed themselves to a 10 week placement, but as William Locke of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit points out, "Sometimes students get so much out of it they want to carry on after their placement. Students often take part in the scheme two years running as well."

Students who act as tutors spend some time each week in a classroom situation, assisting teachers and actively participating in lessons. Some are given a lot of responsibility, and, according to Lilla, who organises the scheme, "Many relish the challenge the classroom situation presents. They gain confidence and develop important skills." Mentors also have an important part to play. They work with a small group of pupils who may be having problems at school. Acting as inspirational role-models, the mentors often see an upsurge in pupils interest, attendance and motivation. As Lilla points out, this experience can be very rewarding.

Third year Psychology student Ann-Kristen Machens worked as a tutor in King's Manor School in Shoreham, coaching pupils for their German GCSE. She says "I found it very challenging because my first language is German, and many of the students could barely speak German at all. It was quite frustrating, but I found they improved quite quickly when they learnt in small groups. I think the large class sizes made people very nervous about speaking German in front of all their class-mates."

Another tutor, Clare Comley, who was participating in the scheme for a second year, summed up the experience: "It's a brilliant scheme to take part in if you want to work with kids, but it's also great for finding out a lot about yourself."

Research Funding Opportunities

This is a selection of Research Opportunities. More details of these and other opportunities are available from the Research Grants & Contracts Office, contact Debbie, ext. 3813 or email: D.Foy-Everett@sussex.ac.uk. For an extensive listing of funding opportunities see REFLUND on the Research Web site: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/research or USIS Home Page, under Research.

The ESRC is inviting initial expressions of interest for submissions regarding evidence based policy and practice. The key objective is that economic and social research should provide an improved knowledge base for users and academics that is relevant, accessible, and quality-assured. Deadline: 17 May 1999.

The EPSRC is inviting preliminary proposals to register research interest in the Innovative Manufacturing Initiative Road Transport. Also sponsored by the ESRC and BBSRC, this IMI focuses on road transport sector and aims to improve the global competitiveness of the UK motor industry. Areas of challenge include: product development; manufacturing; and customer supply. Deadline: 21 May 1999.

The EPSRC, ESRC and DTI are inviting applications from the Management of Information (LINK) collaborative programme in fraud detection and control. Focusing on fraud control, security and privacy, the programme will support research into technologies and systems that manage and process electronic information. Deadline: 28 May 1999.

The British Academy and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique have established a new scheme of grants to support joint projects between British and French scholars, in the fields of the humanities and social science. Grants will support travel expenses, maintenance costs and attendance at workshops, and are up to £2,500 from each side over a two year period. Deadline: 11 June 1999.

The EPSRC is seeking research proposals to a major managed programme to support engineering orientated activity related to the processing of structural materials. £6 million per annum has been earmarked and the programme is expected to run for two years. Deadline: 30 June 1999.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions have announced their environmental research priorities for 1999-2000: global atmosphere; air and environmental quality; noise; chemicals and biotechnology; radioactive substances; water and land; waste policy; and, economics and statistics. A total of £1.5 million is available. Letters of interest to be sent to DETR as soon as possible.
Noticeboard

Lectures, Seminars, Colloquia

Monday 17 May
1.00pm Experimental Psychology Seminar: Rebecca Gomez (University of Arizona), What artificial grammar learning tells about language acquisition. BLR.
2.00pm Palmer Language Group: Keiko Ozaki, The ‘inner ear’ in silent reading in different writing systems. A155.
4.30pm Neuroscience Seminar: Malcolm Maden (King’s, London), Retinoid acid in neural development and regeneration. BLR
5.00pm Women’s Studies Research in Progress Seminar: Paramjit Rai, Indian partition: myth and memory in one narrative. D610.

Tuesday 18 May
4.00pm COGS Seminar: TBA. SC11.
4.15pm Biochemistry and Genetics & Development Seminar: Elmar Schiebel (The Beatson Institute for Cancer Research, Glasgow), Microtubule organisation by the budding yeast centrosome. BLR.
5.00pm Literary and Intellectual History Seminar: Lorna Hutson (Hull), ‘Not the king’s two bodies’: political consciousness in Shakespeare’s Henry IV parts I and II. D410.
5.15pm German Research Colloquium: Sebastian Fohrbeck (Director of German Academic Exchange Service), New possibilities for study and research in Germany: major changes in the German higher education system. A155.

Wednesday 19 May
1.00pm IDS Seminar: Robert Calderer (Manager, Africa World Bank), Influencing anti-poverty policy: the World Bank, governments and the media. IDS 221.
4.30pm Physics and Astronomy Colloquium: Serge Harosce, TBA. Pev 1A7. Tea at 4.00pm on the Bridge. Reception afterwards.
5.00pm Migration Research Seminar: Howard Winant (Temple University, USA) The modern world (racial) system. Arts A71.
5.00pm English Graduate Colloquium: Jacqueline Labbe (Sheffield), On, in, or under? Locating the poet in Charlotte Smith’s Beacy Head. Arts D640.

Thursday 20 May
11.00am Mathematical Analysis Seminar: M Esteban (Paris), TBA. Room 2A2 PEVI.
4.00pm Experimental Psychology Colloquium: Simon Baron-Cohen (WAC), Autism: characterising the cognitive phenotype. BLR.
5.00pm Modern French Thought Seminar: Beatrice Han (Essex), TBA. A71.
5.00pm History Work-in-Progress Seminar: Josslyn Alexander, War stories: narratives of guerrillas and civilians in Zimbabwe. A155.

Friday 21 May
2.00pm SPRU Seminar: Bob Morgan (Washington University), University-based research contributions to industry: findings and conjectures. EDB Lecture Theatre.
4.00pm Chemical Physics and Materials Seminar: Wayne Sinclair (Basel), High resolution electronic spectroscopy of polycrylalene cations by frequency modulation absorption spectroscopy. CHI3241 (M53).
4.00pm Applied Mathematics and Numerical Analysis Seminar: J Chapman (Oxford), Thin film models for type II superconductors. Room 2B13, PEVI.

Staff Development Opportunities

Funding may be available from Staff Development for faculty to attend the following events. Please contact the Staff Development Officer, ext 7188, for further details.
26 May - Group facilitation skills: Oxford Brookes Centre for Staff Development, London.

Advance notice of events later in the year
6-8 September 1999 - 7th International improving student learning symposium: improving student learning through the disciplines, Oxford Brookes Centre for Staff Development, York.

Gardner Arts Centre Freebies

British West African theatre company Teata Fahodzi will perform Bonded on Saturday 22 May. The Gardner Arts Centre has one free ticket to give away to the first 10 readers who turn up at the box office waving a copy of the Bulletin.

Small Ads

FOR SALE: Metro Mayfair 1.0. 1987 E reg. 39,000 miles. FSH, 10ths MOT, Taxed until July, 3 door, metallic blue. Central locking and alarmed. £875. Please call 687496 evenings.

TO LET: Room in centrally located family home with garden, TV and all facilities. Tel. 701553. Terms to be discussed.

SUMMER JOB: The Language Institute wishes to recruit a full-time student social and welfare officer to assist overseas students attending our summer courses (July-September). Details from Student Employment Office, Falmer House. Tel. 678146, or Language Institute Ext 2175/7408.

FOR SALE: Beautiful, spacious 2 bedroom flat with own garage, for sale at £64,995. Quiet, leafy Kempston location. Details tel. 01798 875210.

WANTED: Flat or house for lovely visitor to the university, from 18 May to 13 July. Email kapt8@pcss.maps.susx.ac.uk

FOR SALE: Macintosh Performa 6400 (Power PC 603, 180 MHz), 88MB RAM, 1.6 gig HD, CD, 15" AV monitor. Sold with ZIP drive and HP colour inkjet printer. Some software. £700 ono. Tel: Peter on 50161 or e-mail peter@sleepycod.com

FLATSHARE: Highcroft Villas, Brighton. Double room and small lounge available plus shared kitchen, bathroom and garden with one other tenant. Staff/ postgrad/mature student. M/F, non-smoker preferred. £225 ppcm excl (inc water), £225 deposit, available mid-May. Call 565766 (eves).

WANTED: Piano stool - old style, preferably mahogany, height adjustable. Please contact Alison Lynner on ext 3868 or Email A.M.Lynner@sussex.ac.uk

WANTED: House/2 bed flat for visiting professor from Norway and wife. For 6 weeks from June 1 to July 15. Please contact Richard Wilson on ext 2278 or R.Wilson@sussex.ac.uk.

FLAT FOR RENT: Two-bedroom purpose-built flat in Seven Dials. Fully furnished, washing machine, dish-washer, TV, central heating, parking space, 10 mins walk from Brighton station, 2 mins from shops. Available from mid May to mid September. £750 pcm. Tel: 735653.

HOLIDAY APARTMENT: Comfortable holiday apartment on Lake Garda available some weeks this summer and autumn. Glorious location, fabulous (shared) swimming pool, reasonable rent. mboice@sussexuniv.n-net.com or tel 476813.

WANTED: Research fellow looking for 2-3 bedroom house/ flat in Brighton from 1 August. Please contact David on ext. 7202 or email davidir@biols.susx.ac.uk

Bulletin

The Bulletin appears every Friday during term time with copy deadlines the preceding Friday lunchtime. We welcome any suggestions for news, events, letters and small ads from staff and students of the University.

Please contact the Information Office in Sussex House on ext. 8209 or email: Bulletin@sussex.ac.uk.