



**Manchester's pledge to
improve representation
of homelessness in the
media**



About

The causes of homelessness are complex and often are the result of structural factors. Without public understanding of the extent of homelessness in the UK and the myriad of causes, the sensationalised approach often seen in the media has a damaging impact and slows down the institutional reform that is needed for change. Rough sleeping is just the tip of the iceberg but accounts for the vast majority of media coverage related to homelessness, and this can cause problems off camera for the people involved who despite often being in a vulnerable position are not afforded additional legal or safeguarding protections.

If structural change is to happen the public needs to understand the reality of homelessness in the UK. And unfortunately, that won't happen whilst stereotypes and ratings driven tropes are so readily available for the public to engage with.

During 2019 and 2020 the Booth Centre Media Group discussed the negative coverage of homelessness that has achieved high viewer ratings. The coverage also directly impacted individuals who saw themselves or people they knew portrayed in a way that never aimed to educate the viewer on the whole picture, instead simply reinforcing inaccurate and negative stereotypes and the othering of people affected by homelessness.

The Media Group shared personal experiences of homelessness and interacting with the media and the decision was made to formalise the Booth Centre approach to the media; a focus on portraying individuals not stereotypes and telling empowering stories not ones of victims and saviours.

The Media Group are now asking for more organisations to take the pledge and commit to ending these inaccurate and damaging representations to allow positive change to happen.

What people affected by homelessness said...

"Has anyone ever come into your home to photograph you as you sleep?"

"Have you ever regretted something you said or did whilst under the influence? Did the evidence end up on Channel 4?"

"Please don't photograph or interview me if I am under the influence of alcohol or drugs. I may have a dependency or be heavily under the influence, I may not remember what I have said or done on camera and I cannot give consent. This could be damaging for me in the future; it could prevent me getting a job or accommodation, it will also affect my mental health when I see or realise what has happened. **I'd rather be photographed or interviewed when I am active or showing off my talents. Wouldn't you?**"

"Please don't photograph me without my consent. I understand that sitting on the streets I am in a public space but we ask for dignity and decency. Photographs of me on the streets can negatively impact people who know me and my future. **Please talk to me about why you want to take the photograph and give me the chance to consent.**"

"Please do not include personal information about me such as where I sleep. People get their tents burned, get kicked in their sleeping bags or put into bins. Not all people have compassion for people who are homeless. **Please don't make it easy for them to find me.**"

Manchester's pledge

1. We will work with people to have their voices heard.

If they choose we will enable people to share their story in an empowering way.



2. We will always gain informed consent.

If people are heavily under the influence of drugs or alcohol they cannot give informed consent. If people live with complex challenges in their lives a worker with an established relationship with the individual can support the person to decide if informed consent can be given.



3. We will always prioritise the safety and wellbeing of the individual at all times.



4. All imagery we use will preserve the dignity of those portrayed.

5. Images, footage or words should not sensationalize or stereotype a person or a situation.

6. When filming in services or on the street to provide background footage to illustrate a story we will ensure that all those being filmed are aware that the filming is taking place, are aware of what it is for and where it will be used and have the option to not be included in the filming.



7. We will ensure the individual has the right to a worker with whom they have an established relationship to join them in interviews to support and advocate for them.



8. Be prepared to not tell the story. The individual retains the right for their story to be told or not.



We take the pledge



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