

# Human rights and citizenship: what does it mean for women and children who experience homelessness?

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*‘Poverty generally is experienced as a lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation and an assault on dignity and self-esteem, and a denial of human rights and diminished citizenship’*

(Ruth Lister 2006)

# Citizenship Theorists

- Formal rights & obligations (T. H. Marshall, 1950)
- Gender, Place, Culture (R. Lister, 2007; Williams 1996; Young)
- Relationships between citizens (N. Kabeer, 2005)
- Citizenship as practice (L. Desforges, R. Jones, M. Woods, 2005)

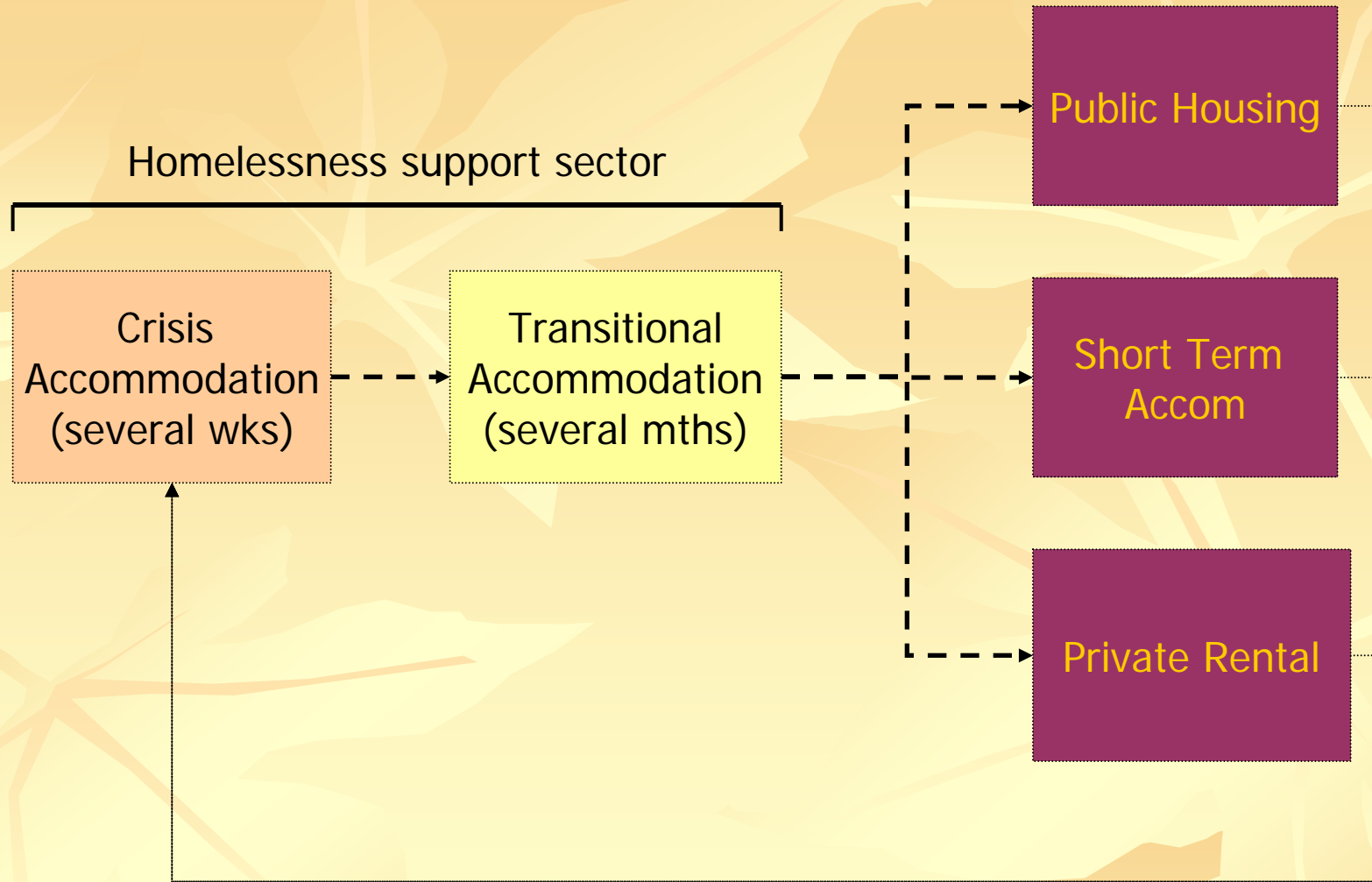
# Family Homelessness & Citizenship Study

- Aim:
  - Explore whether, and how, homelessness affects the lived experiences of citizenship for women with children

# Sample

- 20 mothers interviewed
  - Aged between 19 and late 50s
- Representing a total of 40 children
  - Aged from a few months to 19 years
- All in transitional housing (medium term)

## Homelessness support sector



# Family Homelessness & Citizenship Study

- Experiences living in temporary accommodation, support and compliance
- Experiences dealing with a range of organisations
- Effects of experiences on children, family relationships, connection and belonging
- Perceptions of community attitudes, fairness and equality

# Findings

- Citizen overshadowed by client
  - Personal agency curtailed
  - Participation constrained
  - Lack of respect & dignity
- Aspirations to be 'active citizen'

# Personal agency curtailed

*“Living here I have to basically put my life into someone else’s hands, so to speak. I don’t have the freedom of making all the decisions that I’d usually make and I kind of sometimes feel like I’m not myself anymore because I have to go by what someone else says”*

(Mother, 26 yrs, 2 children 7yrs & 6 yrs)

# Participation constrained

*“The schools around here, they’re like ‘well you’re in transitional, how long does that mean?’ And because I couldn’t give them an answer...the school is not letting us go there. I kept taking him to [the other side of town], but it got to the point where it was just too much...it’s nearly 100 kms [to drop off and pick up], and that’s without me doing what I have to do or having my appointments during the day”*

(Mother 29 yrs, 2 children: 11 yrs, 3 yrs).

# Lack of respect & dignity

*“They make you sad and they make you feel really bad...the way they speak to you they think that they’re giving it out of their pocket...anyone wouldn’t really go there unless they’re really, really desperate, like they don’t have the money and they’ve got kids to feed...even if I was dying from hunger, I would never go again”*

(Mother 42 yrs, child 16 yrs)

# Aspirations to be active citizen

*“To be stable in long-term housing...a permanent address where we can just get on with our lives, [my child can] go to school, then I could start sort of getting involved in a bit more things in the community”*

(Mother 50 yrs, child 6 yrs)

# Conclusion

- Importance of human rights approach
- Value of any charter – what it means for those who are most disadvantaged
- Only means something if effect is on day-to-day level

# Next steps

- National consultation on human rights
- Stage 2 – ARC Linkage project

# Further information

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