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The periphery of care: Emergency services for homeless people in rural areas

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Abstract

Until recently, homelessness in rural areas has received little recognition because of overwhelming assumptions about the urban-centredness of homeless people and their needs. This paper seeks to build on recent research that has begun to uncover some of the problems and characteristics of rural homelessness, by suggesting two significant dynamics which together can shape the experience of different groups of homeless people in rural environments. First, rural places reflect particular local qualities which contextualise both the circumstances of homelessness and the provision of services in response to those circumstances. Secondly, the contemporary governance of homelessness unfolds rather unevenly in different rural areas, producing distinct local service environments with varying degrees of 'insider' and 'outsider' status in relation to joined-up responses to the needs of homeless people. These dynamics are articulated through three case studies: a remote friary in a deep rural area of southern

England; a small hostel run by a vibrant non-statutory organisation in a small town in the west of England, and two advice centres in a coastal resort in the north-east of England. Through these case studies we highlight the importance of both local reactions to the homeless other, and local relations between central government funding, local authority initiatives and charitable organisations, in the production and consumption of spaces of care in settings set in, or serving, rural environments.



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