

## Mile in My Shoes: Kaz's story

*Estimated reading time: 5 minutes*

My name is Kaz. I'm a fourth-generation Londoner. My family all come from Tufnell Park in N7. And I work at Crisis and I'm an Engagement and Assessment Worker.

I've been in this role for over three years now, here at Crisis, but it was a role that I'd already had in another job. People come to us on their worst day ever. They have no idea what's going on, they feel really helpless and it's all about engaging people where they are, being the first point of contact. And just really trying to link in with that person, find out what we can do to help them and make them feel better for coming to see us.

Everyone has their own way into homelessness, and everyone has their own way out. I think people get quite blaming and judgmental about people that are homeless, that they've somehow not coped with life or not done what they needed to do. And actually, now, a lot of the systems are not helping people and people who are working really hard and trying really hard, find themselves rough sleeping.

We do what we call a screening. So that's when someone comes in and we ask them about their situation to make sure we're the right place to help them. For me, when that person is either in front of me or on the phone, they are my main focus just for that amount of time that I'm talking to them and dealing with them. And the whole time I'm talking and dealing with them, one, I want to be as empathetic as possible. I want them to understand why I'm asking the questions I'm asking. I want them to feel safe telling me anything and not feel judged. And then at the end of it, I want to try and say one thing positive to them. And I can do that while I'm just focused on that one person. And then I stop.

You kind of have the mindset that you care desperately about that person while they're at the forefront of your mind. But the minute you've, kind of, finished with them, put a full stop at the end and either someone else has taken over or they've gone somewhere else. You have to kind of switch them off, because otherwise you would never have the resources for the next person.

I think the problem you have is that there are different systems that people have to negotiate in order to resolve their housing issue, and those different systems are not lined up with each other because they all have different priorities.

The fact we allow employers to pay people so little or put them on zero-hour contracts or part-time contracts where they can't earn a living wage, that means that they're on universal credit, which then means they're draining the government of resources. Why are we not making sure that employers are paying people a decent amount of money for their hard-earned work?

We have people come to us who are working, who are homeless. You know, they're just literally like, 'I was living here, and my landlord has just got in touch with me and said, "You've got two months to move out". I haven't got a month's rent in advance. I haven't got a month's deposit and everywhere I am looking I cannot afford. What do I do?' And I haven't got the answers for those people and that's not acceptable, that's just absolutely not acceptable. For me that is just so disingenuous that you're putting that responsibility on people. That the system is broken, there is no affordable housing and yet it's your fault that you haven't got anywhere to live and, and you're in that level of insecurity.

I think it feels like there's an attitude that the help is there if you want it. And actually, no, there is no help.

People have forgotten that housing is a basic need of people. And I think we are seeing, you know, the outcome of a political system that is driven by profit. Profit and loss, that's all they're interested in and that's their attitude. It's not there for the minority, it's not there for those that are struggling. It's there for those that can afford it.

That, I think, is the saddest thing and until those systems are properly resourced and we see that as a priority, then this is going to continue to happen, and we're going to have a whole generation of people that are just damaged and feel unsafe and don't feel secure. And how can they contribute anything to our community and our society, when they're constantly in deficit and constantly in fear. People have battened down the hatches I think, especially since the pandemic. Everyone's just like, 'It's me, myself and I, because there ain't no one else out there looking after me.' That is how it is. They... have got nothing, they're already using all their resources just to survive.

When you're in survival mode you're not looking externally at anybody else because you can't, you just haven't got the resources to do that. And that's why I think this is having such a massive impact on our communities because people are literally so, becoming so insular and literally just thinking about themselves and the next day, and that's all they've got the energy for because there's no other resources coming in to build them up.

When I hear the stories of people that are coming, especially young refugees, it is horrific. It is just relentless. The feeling of disempowerment. They literally have just been sat stagnant, for possibly two years, and then they're expected to just suddenly make everything happen for themselves. And you're kind of like, 'Wow. Wow, is that really how you view people?' And sometimes the only thing I can say to them is, 'Well done for still being alive. Well done for still being here, because I can't imagine what you've been through. I can't imagine the life you've had. And the fact you're still here and you're still fighting and you're still trying to solve your own situation, mate, props to you.' Do you know what I mean. 'And we will do everything in our power to help you.'

I've worked with families where there's been a mother and maybe two children and they've been moved on a weekly basis to a new hotel. How are you expecting those children to mentally and... emotionally understand what is happening for them? How are they supposed



to ever feel secure in where they've been? A safe secure home is the most basic thing that a child needs. A loving, a loving environment where they are the priority for their parents. And you're talking children of seven, eight, nine years old understand what's going on then.

You literally have got thousands and thousands and thousands of children growing up in this environment where home is not a safe place, home is not a comfortable place and home is not permanent. And that is not how we should be... as a society, that's just not acceptable. Everybody should be entitled to a safe, environmentally positive home in order to make them a more productive member of society.