

## **The contributing factors enabling homeless people's transition into formal employment: A Narrative Inquiry**

Roshan Galvaan, Mapheyeledi Motimele, John Ralphs, Rebecca Pretorius, Pamela Matsebanane, Shivani Vassen, Shannon Cohen  
*University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa*

**Introduction:** Homeless people have been described among the most vulnerable and socially excluded persons in society (Williams & Stickley, 2011). Social exclusion can take on many forms, one of which is exclusion from employment in the open labour market.

There has been little South African occupational therapy research exploring the factors that contribute to homeless people's transitions out of homelessness and into formal employment.

**Objective:** This study aimed to describe the enabling factors experienced by homeless people during their transition into formal employment in the open labour market in Cape Town, South Africa.

**Methodology:** Two participants were purposively selected according to the inclusion criteria of having been homeless and having subsequently attained and maintained formal employment status for a period of 6 months or more. Applying a narrative inquiry, three interviews were conducted. Their narratives were recorded and transcribed. Analysis occurred through a qualitative thematic approach.

**Findings:** A single overarching theme, "working through life" emerged. It comprised of four categories: 'trying to stay afloat', 'opportunities to give and take', 'building affirming relationships' and 'evolving identities, shifting mindsets'. The continuous interplay between all four categories, revealed the essential enablers assisting the participants in their successful transition out of homelessness and into formal employment.

**Conclusion:** The study argues that sufficient supports within the occupational transition process, as well as experiential insights are key. It shows that by embracing shifts in occupational identity, through occupational participation and adaptation, the participants' occupational transition out of homelessness into sustained formal employment became feasible.