



NIHR | School for Social
Care Research



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*DECLUTTERING SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH
HOARDING BEHAVIOURS: A SERVICE AND
INTERVENTION BUILT ON TRUST*

DISCLAIMER

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ACRONYMS

Person/People with Hoarding Behaviours = PwHB

People with Lived Experience = PwLE

Professional Declutterer = PD

Local Authority = LA



OUTLINE OF TODAY'S PRESENTATION

- What is professional decluttering?
- Overview of our research project.
- Findings around key theme of trust.
- Time for questions.



WHAT IS PROFESSIONAL DECLUTTERING?

- Forced
 - Without input from PwHB
 - Intensive full days
 - Short-term
 - Nearly everything removed
- PwHB fully involved
 - Weekly sessions of a few hours
 - Long-term/ open-ended
 - Multi-agency approach
 - Parallel psychological support
 - Disposal at PwHB's pace



Deep cleans/clearances

Decluttering

OUR RESEARCH

AIM

To understand the role of professional decluttering services as part of interventions with people with hoarding behaviours (PwHB), who are known to adult social care.

ADVISORY GROUPS

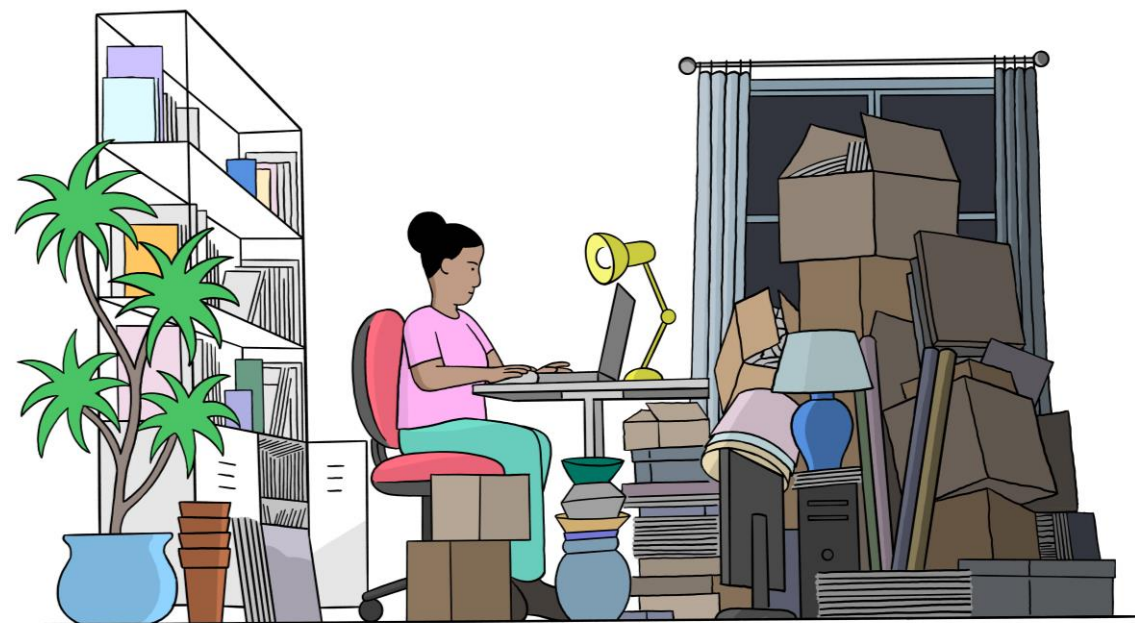
People with Lived Experience (PWLE) Advisory Group

Chair = Person with Hoarding Behaviours (PwHB)

Members = Mix of PwHB and family members/carers

Professionals Advisory Group

- PWLE Advisory Group Chair
- HoardingUK
- Association for Professional Declutterers & Organisers
- British Association of Social Workers
- National Development Team for Inclusion



WHAT WE'VE DONE

AUGUST 2022 – DECEMBER 2023

Review of professional declutterer websites.

Interviews with 18 professional declutterers & 22 front-line LA staff.

Interviews with 6 PwHB who had or were receiving support with decluttering.

4 go-alongs to decluttering sessions in homes of PwHB.

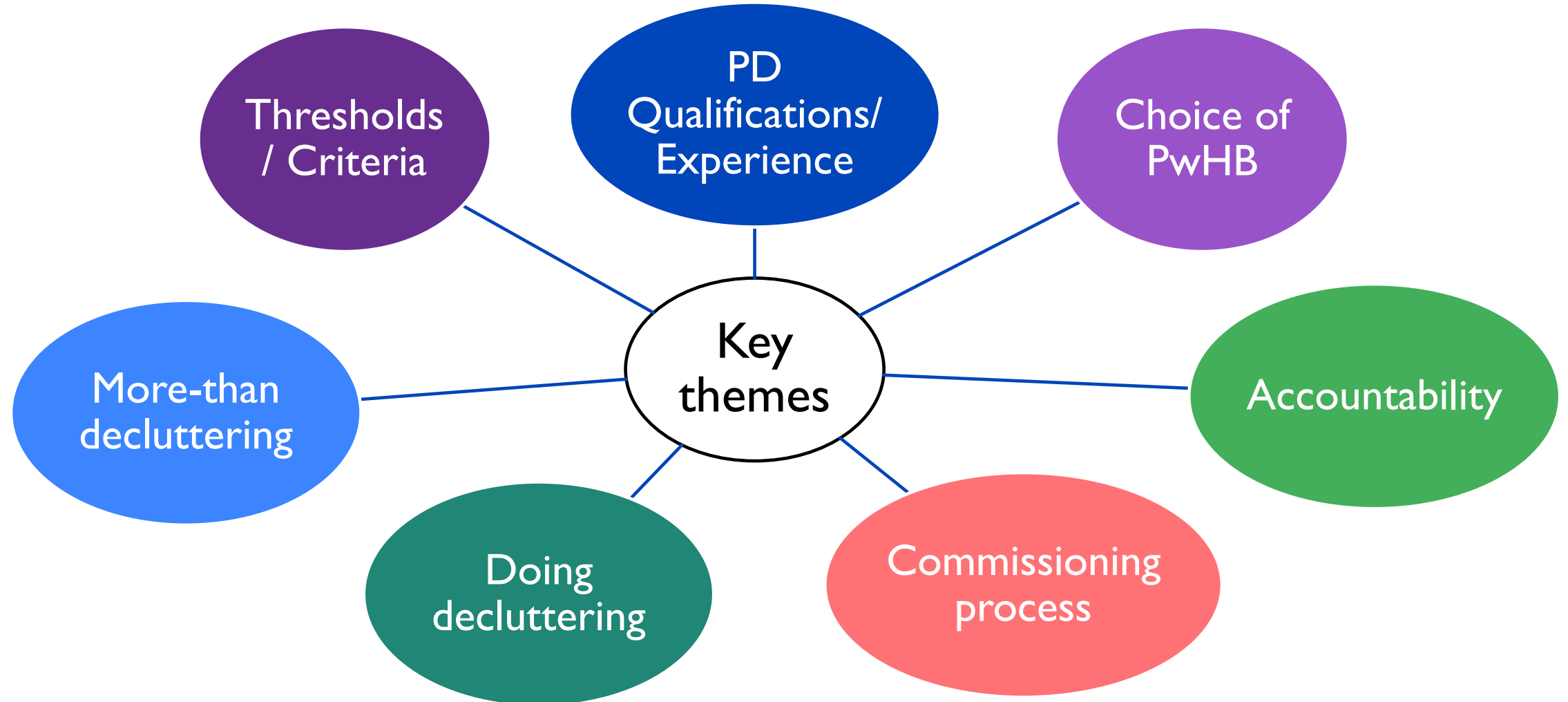
Website review

Interviews with professionals

Interviews with PwHB

Go-alongs to decluttering sessions

FINDINGS



WORKING THROUGH PAST EXPERIENCES

There's an enormous sense of shame. I feel when I talk to people about the difficulties that I have that I'm practically being asked to pull down my pants and bend over. And then they show everybody all the photographs of my bottom, if you see what I mean?

It left me on my knees for six months afterwards. Social services brought some people in, and they did it to me in my house, and it was awful, and it was degrading.

COMMISSIONING

- How services are commissioned varies widely – including thresholds, how found, chosen, duration of work, how paid for etc.
- LA staff reliant on word-of-mouth recommendations. Some looked at training PD had undertaken on HB.
- People with HB have minimal say in picking their PD.
- PD picked for being cheapest option or simply having availability.

I'd love to say they are [given a choice]. The law doesn't say to the local authority that we must provide you an option. So, the go-to position when your resources are dwindling is that if one's cheaper then we will make an economical viable decision.

READY TO WORK TOGETHER

- Part of trust is knowing when not to work with someone. PD's make a judgement call.
- Decluttering only works when someone is ready to engage in it.

They [PD] did come to assess her twice and basically said that she was in the pre-contemplation stage. So, they just said that they couldn't work with her.

I worked with a few local authorities that have insisted that I go in. I'm happy to go and do the consultation process, but if they [PwHB] don't want to work with me or they're not going to engage, there is absolutely no point. They need to want help and they need to be able to work through it and process stuff.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS & FEELING IN CONTROL

- Plan for each session led by PwHB.
- Only exception being when concerns around risk.

I absolutely felt that I had control, and that was absolutely essential.

The thing that is the common always is that the client decides what we're going to do, so I never arrive saying, "Right, we're going to do that corner now. Get a bag and follow me".

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PD & PWHB

It's not something they enjoy, really. But you can see them settle in within about fifteen minutes of working. It's quite interesting because they do trust me, and that takes time to build up.

We've both got stupid sense of humours, which helps.

Her whole manner is excellent. And the way she deals with quite difficult things, where you found things that are emotionally triggering. She dealt very well with that.

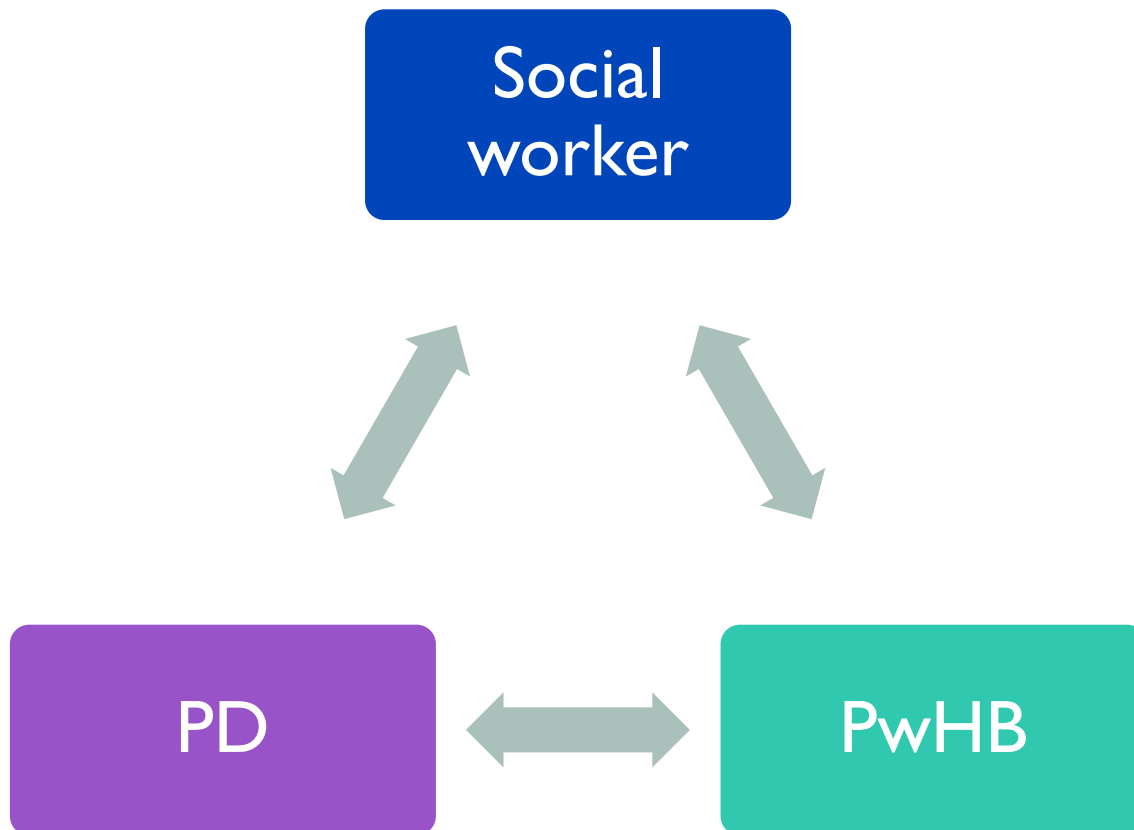
TRUST WITH DISCARDING

- PwHB has decision over what and how things are discarded.
- PD uses local knowledge to best advise and is trusted to see through decisions.

Not making people part with things from day one works because it builds up that trust, like, “She’s not going to make me throw all that out”, we’re going to look through everything.

She has a lovely personality for me to be able to trust her. At first obviously I was watching her like... now I’m not watching all the time what she’s doing and what she might be throwing out.

CHECKING-IN & ACCOUNTABILITY



They [social worker] will normally check-in with me after the first session, but they won't actually be there to see how it's going. So, they check-in with me, they check-in with the client, and then if everything's going okay, then they just kind of let us be and get on with it.

IMPORTANCE OF TRUST IN OUR OWN RESEARCH

I fully understand that you are treating what I'm giving you with respect, and I'm deeply grateful for that because understanding what happens with us, people who suffer with my difficulties is... that it's the only way we shall ever learn how to help people.

CONCLUSION

- There is a need for more consistency and robust processes in the selection, commissioning, and monitoring of PDs.
- PDs should be considered as part of a multi-agency approach.
- Psychological support should be offered as standard.
- There is a need for trust and respect at all stages of the decluttering process.
- Without all of the above, interventions can be a traumatic experience for PwHB.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE PROJECT

- Developing 'What to ask a declutter' guidance.
 - For PwHB (and their family/carers) thinking about working with a PD.
 - For local authorities commissioning PDs.
 - For PDs being asked questions by PwHB/LAs.
- Project report shared.
- Presenting at Hoarding Awareness Week.





THANK YOU.
ANY QUESTIONS?

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY LAURIE ROLLITT

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