



**HOMELESS PERSONS INFORMATION CENTRE  
(HPIC)  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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**Interviewee:** Elma Fleming

**Date:** 9 June 2009

**Place:** Wayside Chapel, Kings Cross

**Interviewer:** Margo Beasley

**Recorder:** Marantz PMD 620

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**TRANSCRIPT**

0.00 **MB:** This is an interview with Elma Fleming. It's taking place in the vestry of Wayside Chapel in Hughes Street in Kings Cross. The project is the Homeless Persons Information Centre – [HPIC] - Oral History Project being conducted on behalf of the City of Sydney's History Programme. My name's Margo Beasley and the date is the 9<sup>th</sup> of June, 2009. Elma, if you wouldn't mind, could you tell me where and when you were born?

EF: I was born in an island in Scotland, called the Isle of Aran \*\*\*\*\*  
1946.

**MB:** It's a long way from the Isle of Aran to the Wayside Chapel in Sydney. Would you mind just giving me a brief career review - how did you actually get here?

EF: All right. In my days on the island, if you wanted to further your education you had to leave the island at fifteen, which I did, and did

my 'Highers' and 'Lowers' as they were called then in Glasgow. I trained as a nurse in the Western Infirmary of Glasgow and then I went to Glasgow University so I could teach nursing. By this time, my husband had joined an American company and decided the two of us down to London – which I thought was the end of the world at that point. So, really I've pretty much followed him 'round the world. We moved to Europe and then we moved to Florida, back to Europe, then to Michigan and it was while I was working with prison families in Michigan in downtown Detroit – which was not a fun city – I heard about this awful place called Kings Cross in Sydney and someone talked about the Wayside Chapel. So, when we got moved to Australia I set out to find Kings Cross and the Wayside Chapel and, believe me, I was pleasantly surprised.

2.04 **MB: So, you're retired now but in your final position here at Wayside what was your title?**

EF: I coordinated the Crisis Centre.

**MB: I think you did actually join Wayside originally as a volunteer – is that correct?**

EF: Yes, I did. A lady who works with my husband said she went to Wayside on Christmas Day and did the street party so we tagged along and the rest is history.

**MB: Now, while you were travelling the world, as you say, you tagged along with your husband but you weren't idle during that time, you did a lot of different things.**

EF: Yes, I did. I studied drug and alcohol and did psychology and wherever we went in the world I did volunteer work.

**MB: So, you both studied and you studied as well as doing volunteer work in the areas that interested you?**

EF: Yes. I did my psychiatric nursing as well and when we went back to Europe I actually got paid employment there.

**MB: What was the paid employment?**

EF: It was nursing, nursing.

**MB: In mental health nursing?**

EF: Yes. And doing some drug and alcohol counselling as well.

**MB: So, you started here at Wayside – what year was that? You may have already said.**

EF: Oh, it was about twenty one years ago, I think.

**MB: Twenty one years?**

EF: Yes, twenty one years ago, I think.

**MB: And you started helping by volunteering with the Christmas Day lunch?**

EF: Yes.

**MB: Perhaps you could just give me a bit of a picture of what that was like then?**

EF: It's quite an amazing feat. It started in 1964, when Wayside started and it was then a little barbeque as what's now known as "the back lane". And now Hughes Street is closed off from Macleay Street down to Orwell [Street] – I think that one's called Orwell down there. And from seven in the morning until five in the afternoon the street is closed and the tables are set, awnings, and we serve the guests; they sit down and have a cooked meal.

4.09 It starts with breakfast and then about eleven o'clock Santa comes on the fire truck - Santa's a policeman and the fire engine brings him – and every person who's here gets a gift, often more than one too, I might add.

**MB: It's a major production now, isn't it, the Christmas Day serving of meals? I wonder if you could contrast the way it was then when you first started and how it is now.**

EF: Right. I think the programme's pretty much the same but there used to be many more people than there are now and I think that's because other agencies now do Christmas as well - though that's a gracious form of flattery, I think, 'cause imitation, but it's good: there's stuff on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. And again on Boxing Day we come to do the clearing up and anybody who comes gets fed as well, so it's lovely, yes.

**MB: That's interesting, isn't it, that there are fewer people coming here for Christmas Day lunch or for meals on that day than there used to be a couple of decades ago because I guess the idea is that homelessness has grown a great deal in that time. But what you're really saying is that other kinds of social services have also grown during that time.**

EF: Absolutely. Other agencies do Christmas Day as well now, which makes a big difference. Having said that, the demand for hampers – we do Christmas hampers in the two weeks leading up to Christmas Eve – that's not diminished in any way.

**MB: Why would that be?**

EF: I think there's more people on the breadline – I really don't know. It's not means tested and in fact there's probably a couple of rather affluent ladies, elderly ladies who ask for a hamper and in fact what we do is a small basket and two volunteers go to visit them and that's really what it's all about.

6.11 **MB: You think they're really after the social contact for Christmas?**

EF: Yes, rather than in need of goodies.

**MB: So, that's just one side of your work. You have actually told me on another occasion that the planning for Christmas Day has already started now and we're only in June.**

EF: Absolutely.

**MB: That's in part because the donations from various companies in Sydney are given before the end of the tax year?**

EF: Yes, yes. It takes a lot of orchestration and obviously we have to work with the Council to get permission to close the street and to get a food licence and all the technical things that need to be done, all the legalities and, yes, to phone around the agencies and write to them and ask for goods because they're all donated – it's quite amazing - toys, clothes, food, yes.

**MB: Now, you started here as a volunteer – that's twenty one years ago – apart from Christmas what did you then also do?**

EF: The Crisis Centre.

**MB: That is manning the Crisis Centre.**

EF: I worked as a volunteer and then when the lady who was coordinating it left I took over.

**MB: As a paid employee?**

EF: Initially again as a volunteer and five years ago we changed ministers and when the now minister came on board, Graham Long, I then became a paid person.

**MB: So, he had a different policy, did he, about that?**

EF: I think it was just things were changing and I felt I maybe had a louder voice if I was a paid person. So, that suited me fine because there

was things that needed improving and things that needed change and, yes.

**MB: So, tell me a bit about the Crisis Centre. Would it be twenty years since you first started actually volunteering in the Crisis Centre itself?**

8.05 EF: Probably about seventeen years, I think.

**MB: What was it like then?**

EF: Quite amazing. Despite the fact we tell students "Don't become emotionally involved" you can't be totally detached and you do become an extended family for the people in need. It was all run by volunteers and I think – well, life's getting easier now with the agencies like HPIC who do all the work for us: you just pick up the phone and they do the hard work. In days gone by we used to have to phone 'round to various agencies and find - - -

**MB: To try and find a bed?**

EF: - - - find a bed for somebody, yes. A lot of people come just to talk; they just need an ear. And the Crisis Centre is not – it's called the 'Community Centre' now but it was called the 'Crisis Centre' then – it's not there really to solve anything; you do solve things with people but really just people want to be listened to.

**MB: So, its primary purpose is to be available?**

EF: Yes. Finding beds is a huge problem; if our visitors go into gaol we're sometimes the only visitors they get; people going into hospital, we help them; a lot of the people who come here are illiterate, so reading and writing: we help address these issues. Girls who are pregnant, you know, with all the choices, the options, you know, the programmes you can go into; sometimes this is the only phone number they can provide for somebody to make contact with them. And many, many people, even in this day and age, don't have identification, so that's something else that the centre here helps with.

**MB: So, you might assist somebody to go through the various government departments and so on to get different kinds of identification?**

EF: Yes, yes.

**MB: Why is identification so important?**

EF: I think nearly, almost without exception, every agency that we deal with requires identification.

10.05 **MB:** Including HPIC?

EF: Including HPIC, yes.

**MB:** Now, we're talking here generally about your work in the Crisis Centre or Community Centre as it's now known but the focus of this interview is actually HPIC.

EF: HPIC, yes.

**MB:** But I would like just to talk a little bit more about your work in the Community Centre first and then we'll talk about HPIC because it gives anybody who's listening a bit more of a big picture background to your contact with HPIC. So, many of the people who would come in here to the Crisis or Community Centre would be homeless but not necessarily so?

EF: No, and some people are homeless by choice. Whatever circumstances, whatever path they've walked, they choose to be out there rather than be accommodated and there's also the harsh reality that if somebody's given a choice of paying rent or being able to buy drug and alcohol that's where their money goes rather than on rent. It's also quite difficult to accommodate people with transgender problems and people with dual diagnosis: that's mental health and/or drug and alcohol. They tend to become a pendulum: they go to try and find accommodation and they're asked "Have you used today?" and they say, "Yes", very often they're told, "Well, you need to go to a drug and alcohol place". So, these things are getting better but that's hard. It's also hard to accommodate a mother with her male child over twelve years of age because female refuges won't take male child twelve year of age.

**MB:** Twelve years of age?

EF: Yes. So, it is getting better, thankfully, but these issues still do exist.

**MB:** When you say that homelessness is sometimes a choice for people, can you give me an example of that, a story about someone you've known?

11.58 EF: A gentleman who was in the legal profession in another state took time off work to nurse his wife through cancer. His wife died, had the funeral, he packed up the house, he packed a backpack and a tent and he took off and he came to Sydney. And by the time I met him in the Crisis Centre he'd been living nomadically for six weeks. It took possibly three or four weeks to really get in communications with that gentleman and to cut a long story short he's now back in his own state, functioning as a barrister. So, that was just a case of sadness, loss; he'd totally changed his life.

**MB: And what was he seeking from Wayside – was he seeking accommodation?**

EF: I think he said he was walking past and he'd seen some people outside, singing with a guitar and he thought this was a fairly friendly place to come to. And he came in, he found the coffee shop and realised that it was a nice atmosphere and he saw people at the desk, talking, and realised we had a bathhouse, a place where you could change, so that's what attracted him here – he'd never heard of the place, he said.

**MB: And did he actually want you to find him a bed?**

EF: No, no. It was only probably after daily contact for about four weeks that he was willing to agree that it wouldn't be a bad thing to do, to have a bed. And in the end when he started to decide he'd go back in the right direction, shall we say, that he started to pay for accommodation for himself.

**MB: But prior to that he was sleeping out in a -?**

EF: In a tent, yes.

**MB: With a sleeping bag.**

EF: And probably for the last three weeks that he was in Sydney he took paid accommodation. He was one person who felt he didn't deserve anything; he had chosen this lifestyle so he couldn't take what he called charity. But, yes, I hear from him every Christmas and he's doing well.

13.58 **MB: Well, that's a nice story. Choice is a bit of a complicated word, isn't it?**

EF: Yes.

**MB: You've mentioned people who may have sufficient benefits to actually pay for accommodation but "choose" not to because they have a serious drug and alcohol problem or something similar. Most people, I guess, are on the streets not because they choose to but because of life's circumstances. Perhaps you could just give me a bit of a quick run-through of the kinds of people you might see here in a day or a night.**

EF: All right. One family comes to mind, a husband and wife, and they have two little girls. Now, the wife can get accommodated with the two little girls. It's difficult to get them accommodated as a family, so he chooses to live in the car - you're deemed homeless if you live as a family in the car so the children can't be there. So, it's really not a

good plan that the mother and two children can get long term accommodation but as a family they're really struggling.

**MB: Why is that?**

EF: He's got mental health problems so he can't be employed and he also gets very claustrophobic. He'll tell me that he'll probably get out of the car ten times at night just to get – as he says – “air”, so.

**MB: And why can't they be accommodated as a family?**

EF: Perhaps because he won't stay with any programme long enough to do the hard yards, he refuses to take medication; he's non compliant with medication, so, yes, there's lots of reasons.

**MB: And so where is the mother and the two children – where are they?**

EF: They've been, I think for about four months now in regular accommodation but until then they just went from one refuge to another or took a bed with anybody who'd give them a bed. But the children are now being educated, which is good – they're at school.

16.04 **MB: So, they would have been missing out on school - - -**

EF: Absolutely, yes.

**MB: - - - while the family was homeless?**

EF: Homeless, yes.

**MB: I guess that's quite a common problem?**

EF: Yes, yes. I mean, we're certainly not – people here don't judge. I didn't judge when I worked here either but we don't always know the circumstances of why other people because of their culture don't like to be enclosed, rather live in an open space.

**MB: Who are you referring to there?**

EF: I'm thinking on a couple of Aboriginal clients who just don't like four walls and for a while they had a canvas – four poles and a canvas on top – and that was fine: they had a roof over their head but they weren't enclosed. So, yes.

**MB: So, why would they be visiting you here if they weren't seeking accommodation, if they prefer to be out in the open?**

EF: They do frequently come and ask for accommodation but often wander off in the middle of the night. And I think it's an



understanding that if they're not going to use the accommodation you'd be as well not putting them in it.

**MB: I see. So, you think that they're trying to conform to the idea that they should want - - -**

EF: Yes. Oh, yes, definitely.

**MB: - - - a conventional house?**

EF: House, yes.

**MB: But when it comes down to it -?**

EF: They can't last the night.

**MB: That's interesting, isn't it? What about gender issues and so on amongst the people that you deal with?**

EF: It's hard to accommodate a transgender person. In days gone by you could ask them were they pre or post-operative – you can't do that any longer.

**MB: Why is that?**

EF: I think the law was changed for their own privacy, shall we say, for want of a better word. But that certainly is an issue. And again, as I say, dual diagnosis, hard to get people in

18.07 And, to be quite honest, there's not always enough beds available for the demand and that's no particular fault. I think – and this is a personal comment; this is not to do with the Wayside Chapel – I think leading up to the Olympics it was amazing how many homeless people were taken off the streets so there wouldn't be seen to be so many homeless so I have this wonderful belief that one day it will be possible.

**MB: Where were they put, those people who were taken off the streets?**

EF: Oh, one example was the old hospital at Parramatta was cleaned up and sleeping bags and beds put in there and, yes. Again, it's difficult to get day beds; that's a huge weakness.

**MB: Yes. Can you talk a bit about that, about day beds, what the issue is there?**

EF: A lot of the girls and boys work during the night and they need somewhere to stay during the day and most refuges put people out in the morning and don't take them in till late afternoon. So, these night

workers, shall we call them, could do with some day beds somewhere. Other – mainly it's the ones who work at night is the problem.

**MB: And that's the explanation for why you might often see people very sound asleep in an alcove or on the footpath or a bench in the middle of the day?**

EF: Oh, absolutely, absolutely – they have nowhere else to go.

**MB: And the daytime is when they have their deep sleep?**

EF: Yes, yes. There is a lot of place open twenty four hours a day, there's the sex workers; there's lots of reasons they work at night and don't have somewhere to go to in the day. And you're more noticeable during the day than during the night, if you're sleeping.

**MB: Yes, that's definitely true. In broad daylight it's very obvious that somebody's sound asleep in a - - -**

EF: Alleyway, yes.

**MB: And, yes, that it's very uncharacteristic; most people sleep at night, don't they? O.K, so let's to talk about HPIC and the relationship between Wayside and HPIC.**

20.06 EF: Yes. That service improved tremendously – life is very much easier for the workers here now: you just pick up the phone and dial the 1800 number and HPIC do the hard graft.

**MB: And what do you mean by the "hard graft" – what's that?**

EF: They'll phone around to see where there's a bed and let you know and in days gone by you had to do all the phoning to the various refuges. I think they're told in the morning how many beds are available so they've got a list of all the places - - -

**MB: From the agencies?**

EF: Yes, yes. I think too they get proclaimed beds: people who are intoxicated, IPU units, which is great.

**MB: I'm sorry – what's IPU units?**

EF: Intoxicated Persons [Units]. And maybe somebody during the day's lying out in the street, they're very drunk. The Wayside Chapel would phone HPIC and they would find a bed for them where they can be observed to make sure they don't lie on their back and be sick and then he'll vomit or whatever and then Missionbeat would come and pick them up and take them to that agency if Wayside phoned them.

**MB:** Yes. People sometimes have the impression that at HPIC it's merely a matter of just being on the phone, taking requests for beds and then finding somewhere for those people to go but it's a lot more complex than that, isn't it?

EF: Oh, yes. You know, they're doing a good job and - - -

**MB:** What other kinds of things are part of that job?

EF: I think perhaps the things we've found, like refuges for families and it might be somebody coming out of gaol and the welfare worker for gaol can work with HPIC so that when the person comes out they don't fall down the crack: can go from gaol into a refuge, whatever. Just the fact that they liaise with all the refuges is a big help but, yes, it makes life a lot easier.

22.04 **MB:** So, in the past, I think you're saying really until fairly recently, if somebody presented here and had nowhere to go for the night you wouldn't have phoned HPIC, you'd have phoned around all the possible - - -

EF: Refuges, yes.

**MB:** - - - places like Matthew Talbot or - - -

EF: Yes, or ..... Lodge or Women's Place or - I think too in days gone by Tony Mundine: we would phone Tony Mundine and he would help with Aboriginal beds and so on.

**MB:** He's a famous boxing family who runs - - -

EF: Yes. I think people called him 'Mr Glass Jaw' because he so often got his jaw broken, boxing.

**MB:** And he runs a gym in Redfern?

EF: Yes, he does, that's right. His son's still boxing, I think.

**MB:** Anthony; a very famous former footballer and boxer.

22.54 EF: That's the one, yes. So, HPIC makes life - it's more efficient, it's most, I think, cost-friendly and it certainly helps agencies like the Wayside Chapel and all the other agents that help get accommodation.

**MB:** So, what is it that attracted you originally to this kind of work?

EF: I really have no idea. I think I was brought up with a mother who was perhaps born before her time: she was educated, she drove a car

and I remember when I started school the teacher asked me how many brothers and sisters I had and the class laughed because I said "I don't know". My mum seemed to take every waif and stray in that was needy, and she was a teacher.

**MB: Is that right?**

EF: Yes, if somebody went to hospital they came to us or whatever.

**MB: So, you had a lot of children around you that weren't blood relatives?**

EF: Oh, yes, yes. And home being an island everybody knew everybody else, so, you know, you gravitated to each others' homes. But, yes, I can always remember the kids at school laughing when I said I didn't know how many brothers and sisters I had.

24.05 So, I guess maybe that, and it was a community atmosphere. I think one of the farms had travelling people working for them and I must have been probably about eight, and my mum said, you know, "We need to get you out the way, dear", and she said, "Oh, no, just come with me". And one of the workers stopped gave birth to a child in the corner of the field and insisted she wanted to go back to work again which wasn't allowed. So, I think you're exposed to things much more quickly.

**MB: So, by the "travelling people" you mean what would conventionally be called "gypsies"?**

EF: Yes, we call them tinkers in Scotland.

**MB: Tinkers?**

EF: Yes. So, you certainly saw life as a child and maybe I really didn't realise there was such a thing as an unhappy household, so, I left the island at fifteen to be educated and it came as quite a shock that everybody didn't have happy families.

**MB: What did your father do?**

EF: He was a surveyor.

**MB: And so you grew up in a household where presumably you do know now who your brothers and sisters are?**

EF: Oh, absolutely, yes. It didn't take me very long. I think I went home and said, "How many brothers and sisters have I got", so - - -

**MB: How many did you have?**

EF: One, one sister.

**MB: I see. But you had this informal extended family.**

EF: Extended family, yes.

**MB: And you've told us a bit about going to America. One of the things I was wondering about when you said, I think it was while you were in Michigan, you heard about this terrible place called Kings Cross in Australia. What was it that you heard about Kings Cross?**

EF: Oh, this was the den of iniquity; it was full of prostitutes and drug users. And then someone said, "Oh, they've got a little place there called the Wayside Chapel and it seems to be helping the prostitutes and the drug addicts". So, I was in downtown Detroit, and trust me, that was not a fun city, so I thought this place must be really awful if people here say it's dreadful. So, I was fairly pleasantly surprised.

26.06 **MB: So, presumably people who are working in these kinds of fields, even in Detroit, you hear about other areas where there are similar social problems?**

EF: Yes.

**MB: That's why they would have been talking about Kings Cross?**

EF: About it because somebody who had actually had a friend who had come here and I think had had an unfortunate experience in the first night here and left the Cross, didn't stay any longer, so that was the lasting impression they were left with, this awful place, so.

**MB: I get the impression that even though you've technically retired that you are still a very regular visitor here – is that right?**

EF: And to other agencies as well. I do dual visits and people – not always, but some of them were visitors here at Wayside - some of them from other places, if they're in hospital go to help them, help them when they get accommodation, etcetera, you know, to furnish the place. And yes, I took redundancy from here July 2008 but I think I'm probably busier now than I've ever been. People can find you more easily when you're not full time employed.

**MB: And when you say you took redundancy, why was that?**

EF: The system is changing here and the Crisis Centre ceased to be the Crisis Centre - it became the Community Centre - different hours, different form of management, more computer side and I like the hands-on people side, so yes.

**MB:** So, you've had really a lifetime in this kind of work, the "helping professions" as they're described.

EF: Mm.

**MB:** You've enjoyed it?

EF: Yes, it's a strange thing to say but you always remember the good over the bad, of course, but there's such a lot of humour and friendship, yes, and I like people, which is a big plus.

28.01 **MB:** I meant to ask this before but when you said you did finally come to Wayside to do the Christmas dinners that you found that it wasn't the place that had been described to you in Detroit, what did you find?

EF: I found that Kings Cross could perhaps have been any city at night. Of course there was sex workers and there was drug users but that's worldwide and I just felt comfortable the first time I walked into Wayside; it just seemed to be a good place. And that sounds awful corny but really it's a comfortable feeling. And I think the fact that people who work here, we work within a non-judgemental, harm minimisation framework and that's a big plus whatever way you look at it. And I think the longer you do this job the more you realise that mental health in particular is across the board, you know, drug and alcohol can happen to anybody; there's so much social drinking that people don't really realise how dangerous alcohol can be. But, yes, people are people wherever you go.

**MB:** When you said the philosophy here is non-judgemental and harm minimisation, I suppose to put that in another way it means broadly finding everybody, no matter how extreme their problems, acceptable?

EF: Yes.

**MB:** And although Wayside is actually a church, I think there is a non-denominational approach?

EF: Absolutely. Ted Noffs' [Wayside Chapel founder] creed still carried on, which is "All faiths and none" and that's respected.

**MB:** So, was there ever a particular denomination associated with Wayside?

29.54 EF: It's the Uniting Church that it's run by but the minister here can talk religion with people, the people at the desk can listen but they don't preach and, as I say, there's people from all faiths and again none who do come here on a daily basis.

**MB: And what about yourself – do you have a particular faith?**

EF: I was brought Wee Free Church of Scotland.

**MB: Way Free, is it?**

EF: Wee Free, W-E-E, Wee Free Church of Scotland. We've got no music. We've a presenter who stands out, sings the first line and everybody joins in and Old Testament psalms, no hymns. So, yes.

**MB: They weren't fully in favour of a lot of light-heartedness then?**

EF: Oh, absolutely not. Sundays, everybody had to be in their house by ten minutes to midnight, my father included, particularly when my grandmother was alive. And on a Sunday you didn't whistle, you didn't sing. Girls certainly didn't wear trousers – you had to wear a dress – and I can remember feeling very wicked as a small girl, going into the bathroom with my trousers secreted, changing into my trousers, doing a little dance, back into my dress and out the bathroom again – I felt very evil.

**MB: So, nobody knew you were wearing them?**

EF: No.

**MB: But although the church might have been rather harsh, it sounds as though in your household it didn't affect personal relationships.**

EF: Oh, no, not at all. I mean, as children we did the thing: we went for an hour of catechism and then into church. But, no, it didn't narrow the mind in any way in our house.

**MB: So, you still grew up in a place that enjoyed enjoyment?**

EF: Oh, absolutely, yes. And I think it gave you good values. And I think too - it's not HPIC but ten years ago the minister here was the Reverend Ray Richmond and he took a big risk. We, each and every one of us, police included, were tired of finding dead bodies, died from an overdose because they'd secreted themselves behind a wall or behind a dustbin to inject and he took a very big risk and a lot of us got involved and started an illegal injecting centre here at Wayside.

32.10 It was called the 'Tolerance Room' which became affectionately known as the 'Tea Room'. It didn't last very long but it brought the government's attention and now there is the MSIC, the Medically Supervised Injecting Centre here in Kings Cross and you're not finding dead bodies like you used to; it's really working. If somebody overdoses in there there's staff there to deal with them, so. And again it's not the Wayside Chapel's belief necessarily but it's mine: I

think if somebody has the courage to be registered as a heroin user that they get their heroin by prescription so they don't have to steal or prostitute or deal to get the money to buy it and to keep them safe, the right dose and taper it off them, so.

**MB: But that's not the case yet, is it?**

EF: No, no.

**MB: You can't legally acquire heroin?**

EF: Not yet, no.

**MB: But that's what you'd like to see?**

EF: Yes, and it's part of in years gone by what I did, and I went to Amsterdam where they were doing the trials and Switzerland and I think it's a great thing.

**MB: Just one other thing about homelessness. Although you don't have so many people coming for Christmas lunch, as you've said because many other agencies do the same kind of thing - - -**

EF: Yes.

**MB: - - - has homelessness itself increased in the time that you've been involved here?**

EF: I think so. I think towards the end of – even with what I'm doing away from here now I see more families who were gainfully employed have lost their job, they can't get reemployed and they're struggling financially and they either can't afford the rent or – I think in one family I'm dealing with just now they couldn't pay their mortgage, their house was repossessed and they find themselves homeless.

33.58 **MB: Yes, that's what's cited now as the growing proportion of homelessness is people who previously didn't have any kind of social or psychiatric problems - - -**

EF: Absolutely, yes.

**MB: - - - who now are homeless because they have lost their houses because they simply can't afford to pay it.**

EF: That's right, yes. I don't know whether that'll get worse before it gets better – who knows in this environment? But certainly that's something that I recognise now that didn't used to happen or it wasn't families like that came looking for homelessness. I'm not sure if they're finding that at Wayside necessarily at the moment.



**MB: But that's what you've observed around the place?**

EF: Yes, yes.

**MB: Is there anything else you'd like to say today, Elma?**

EF: I think we've covered most bases and I hope you could still understand my accent when you – but, yes, I think homeless persons are getting better and getting stronger, doing a good job.

**MB: Thank you very much for that.**

**Interview ends**