

Beyond the rhetoric of youth homelessness:

Telling it as it is

'Vermin, scum, basically I had so many names called at me for living under a bridge ...I hated it. I just hated life ... I just wanted to get out of society. I was rock bottom anyway'

(young person interviewed)

A small scale qualitative research study listening to young people aged 16-24yrs who have experience of homelessness and complex need

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We hope that the effort of all involved to produce this report will contribute to an improved knowledge and understanding of the complex nature, context and lived experience of young homeless people.



Professor Julian Buchanan
November 2010

'I ended up getting arrested...which usually happens and that's why I'm in and out of jail...

...it didn't bother me if I got arrested...because at least in jail you've got a routine, you've always got a bed, you've always got food...

...it's just easy to get used to ... it's better than being out on the streets...last time I got out of jail was like three weeks ago, I didn't want to leave...

...I just loved having the routine and having people there who cared about me and who tried to help me.'

(Young person interviewed)

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Executive Summary

Demographic Data

It is evident from the demographic data that the young people interviewed had complex need which included emotional and mental health problems, disabilities, being looked after and being excluded from mainstream education. From the accounts given, accessing services to meet their identified needs became more difficult on becoming homeless; for example, it is harder to obtain employment/education without a permanent address. This is identified in the Social Exclusion Unit Task Force report 'Realising Young Potential and Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (2009)¹. The report indicates that during consultation with young people, 75% of young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) in one area (Norfolk) were living in unsuitable housing such as hostels. The Wrexham area where the research took place contains areas of high deprivation with Queensway area being ranked one of the most deprived areas in Wales. In the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (revised 2010) which included data from 190 areas in Wales comparing income, employment, health, education, skills, and training, housing, physical environment, geographical access to services and community safety, Queensway was listed as the 3rd most deprived overall. However, there are many areas of Wrexham which consistently achieve much better scores so the deprivation is not widespread or necessarily typical for the borough.

Context & Experience

Most young people in this study had grown up in families where their parents/carers had their own difficulties to cope with. Therefore, many of the young people did not benefit from a secure childhood environment as a foundation to mature and develop. What is also interesting is that some of the young people blamed themselves when their parents or carers '*couldn't cope*' defining themselves as a '*problem child*'. Almost half of the young people had been looked after by the local authority (n=9) on both a long term and short term basis. The Social Exclusion Unit Task Force report 'Realising Young Potential and Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (2009)² identifies that care leavers with significant support needs are in greater need of effective co-ordinated intervention, without which they risk increased disadvantage. The report identifies the high risk groups as young people with mental health problems, learning difficulties, emotional and attachment difficulties, substance misuse, young offenders and young parents-such needs were manifested in the respondent group.

1 Cabinet Office. (2009). Realising young potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training.

2 Cabinet Office. (2009) Realising young potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training.

Perceived Needs

All the young people interviewed expressed that they wanted a more stable lifestyle. Securing permanent accommodation that met their needs was seen as a priority. However, some young people described being placed in unsuitable accommodation, which was particularly problematic for young parents. Many of the young people had not had an opportunity to develop skills needed to live independently, like meal planning, hygiene and budgeting. The support given by the hostels to develop independent living skills was valued by the young people. The young people all aimed to be engaged in employment or education and training, although being without permanent accommodation presented considerable challenges to achieving this aim. The Social Exclusion Unit report 'Transitions: Young People with Complex Needs'³ identified that vulnerable young people, including care leavers, lack the social networks and social capital necessary to enable them to make informed choices about their future. Again, the support given by the hostels, including provision of a training officer, was viewed as helpful by the young people.

Barriers to Accessing Services

There appears to be a lack of accessible information about the services available, with young people describing trying to locate services when they are in a crisis situation. This is supported by the recent Shelter Cymru petition⁴ to the Welsh Assembly Government which called for education about leaving home to be made part of the national curriculum. It is evident that the young people face barriers in accessing frontline services, particularly in the statutory sector. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amended the Children Act 1989 and imposed new duties on the local authority to provide better services to care leavers as part of corporate parenting responsibilities. In seeming conflict to the concept of corporate parenting, the young people describe feeling judged by the staff in the Homeless section of the housing department, which they find especially difficult as they are required to impart personal information about how they became homeless in order to secure emergency accommodation.

Clearly, it is important for staff to demonstrate sensitivity and respect when interviewing vulnerable young people. The definition of priority need leads to difficulties. Young men over the age of 18 tend not to fall into the 'priority need' group which means that they are unlikely to be allocated housing authority or housing association priority. Young homeless people can experience stigma and discrimination from the general public, which has an impact on what is often already low self esteem. This can lead to young people trying to hide their situation, and feeling ostracised from society.

³ Social Exclusion Unit (2005) *Transitions. Young People with Complex Needs*. London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister;

⁴ Norman, K. (2009) *Teens backing call to put leaving home on the curriculum*, *Western Mail*, 3 December 2009 accessed online <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2009/12/03/teens-backing-call-to-put-leaving-home-on-the-curriculum-91466-25309111/> 29th March 2010

Facilitators to receiving help

There is a range of valued support for homeless young people in Wrexham provided by the voluntary sector, with staff who are perceived by the young people to be committed, supportive and approachable. However, it should be recognised that the provision of some voluntary services, for example the after care services at Barnardos, are in part funded by the local authority, therefore the distinction between statutory and voluntary provision is not clear cut. Young people are appreciative of the services that are provided including practical support to meet basic needs of food, warmth and shelter, and emotional support. Young people also value friendships with other people in similar situations, and obtain support from the relationships they develop. The relationships are particularly important as the young people are often without family support. This factor emerged strongly from the research, and developing mechanisms to enhance these important social support systems is identified as a recommendation for improved policy and practice.

Gaps in service provision

The number of homeless young people in Wrexham is difficult to establish⁵ as there are 'hidden homeless'. For example, young people who do not have permanent accommodation, but are 'sofa surfing' do not appear in official statistics. The recent provision of Ty Nos night shelter in Wrexham is valued by the young people who have stayed there, although some young people are put off going to the night shelter as they feel intimidated by the older, established homeless people who use the facility. For vulnerable homeless young people, dormitory style accommodation while better than sleeping on the streets may feel a threatening situation.

It appears that there are at times not enough places to meet the demand given the number of homeless people in Wrexham, which includes young people. There are young people in Wrexham who are rough sleeping, sleeping in parks, outside public buildings and in makeshift shelters. Young people have been victims of crime and verbal abuse while street homeless with over half the respondents (n=12) having been a victim of crime. Although the young people spoke positively about the support given by the voluntary sector and within the hostels, finding permanent accommodation proved to be very difficult; waiting lists for local authority and housing association property are long, with young people resorting to using the private sector which does not have the same protection as social housing provision. Furthermore, there is a need for more accessible and practical support when young people do secure their own tenancy.

Young people's suggested improvements

The young people suggested a range of improvements and were appreciative of being asked for their ideas. The suggestions included more night shelter type provision, and more structural aspects like changing the definition of priority need so it was not so restrictive, particularly in relation to young men over eighteen.

⁵ Hart, E., (2006) Youth Homeless Scoping Paper, Welsh Assembly Government, <http://www.cynulliadcymru.org/c47f2ac6b4726e395a40b310f172f081.pdf> accessed 25th March 2010

Many of the young people identified having somewhere to spend time during the day as important; the needs identified included having a place for warmth and shelter and being able to obtain advice, although mainly to gain support from other young people who are in a similar situation. It is pertinent to note that by 31st March 2010, the Personal Advisors service will be delivered 'in house' by Social Services, rather than being provided by Barnardos. Although it is understood that the provision of further facilities is being explored, the informality and accessibility of the existing established daily drop in service will come to an end.

The young people valued spending time with others who had been homeless, believing that a greater level of understanding was achieved. Some young people suggested that staff employed to work with homeless young people should have experienced homelessness themselves, perhaps as a consequence of not feeling understood by some front line staff. The young people expressed a desire to offer support and advice to other young people and were keen for mechanisms to be put in place to allow them to do this.

1. Introduction

Homelessness and Young People

Homelessness is a serious 21st century problem in the United Kingdom with potentially devastating long term consequences for the young people it affects. Homelessness almost trebles a young person's chance of developing mental health difficulties; it marginalises and isolates people from mainstream society; and is often linked with drug and alcohol misuse.⁶ The interconnected relationship between youth homelessness, severe social exclusion and multiple disadvantages is well established. Young homeless people, often with a history of marginalisation, face considerable barriers to access services and gain the support they need. Breaking this cycle of homelessness and social exclusion requires integrated service provision. Agencies need to be able to work collaboratively in partnership with each other to respond to the complex problems faced by young homeless people and to be able engage meaningfully and effectively with the young people⁷.

There is no universal definition for homelessness. Although homelessness is widely understood as rough sleeping, it also includes a broader definition of people who are living in extreme impoverished conditions (such as living in a derelict house), or in temporary unsuitable accommodation (such as sleeping on the sofa at family or friends)⁸. Homelessness denies a person somewhere to live that is secure, safe, healthy and private and leaves them vulnerable and isolated from important support networks⁹. Local authorities use the term 'statutory homelessness' which refers to a person who is able to demonstrate:

- a. There is no accommodation that they are entitled to occupy (they have not made themselves intentionally homeless) or if there is accommodation they must demonstrate that it is not reasonable for them to continue to live there.
- b. They must be classed as 'priority need'.
- c. They must be entitled (due to local connections) to access the temporary and permanent accommodation available to that local authority.

Anyone seeking help from the local authority must meet the criteria above which is open to interpretation¹⁰ that can make it difficult for people to be officially classified as homeless. The classified 'priority needs' groups as classified by the Welsh Assembly Government are:

6. Social Exclusion Unit, (2005), *Transition: young adults with complex needs a Social Exclusion Unit final report*, London: ODPM

7 See 1 above

8 Fitzpatrick, S., Kemp, P.A. and Klinker, S. (2000) *Single Homelessness: An Overview of Research in Britain*. Bristol: The Policy Press

9 Shelter Cymru (2007) *An Unnatural Disaster: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into homelessness and poor housing conditions in Wales*, Swansea

10 WAG (2009) *Ten Year Homeless Plan for Wales, 2009-2019*,
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/desh/publications/090724homelessnessplanen.pdf>

'... include all 16 & 17 year olds, and also to care leavers and other young people at risk of sexual or financial exploitation aged 18-20. The legislation also requires local authorities to give priority need to other people who are vulnerable as a result of a special reason. The statutory Code of Guidance asks local authorities to give particular consideration to young people who have no recourse to parental support. Local authorities also have a duty to formulate homelessness strategies'¹¹

Even if someone is considered 'statutory homeless', if they or members of their household have as a result of 'unacceptable behaviour' which has resulted in them being deemed unsuitable as a tenant, they may be ineligible for housing¹². However, despite this narrow definition in 2007 6,336 households in Wales were classed as 'statutory homeless'¹³.

While local authorities have responsibility for collecting data on the number of people who are homeless, they tend to focus upon those deemed 'statutory homeless' and therefore it is difficult to provide an accurate estimate on the number of homeless people living in Wales. There are inevitably a large proportion of people who are homeless but fail to qualify for housing assistance from local authorities. These people often look to extended family and friends and may seek housing assistance from the private or voluntary sector, however, these sectors do not offer accommodation to all, and they also specify criteria which must be met. A housing policy which places responsibility upon the local authority to provide shelter for a discrete group of homeless people has not surprisingly, given the limited resources available, created tensions between the voluntary and the statutory sector.¹⁴ However, the Welsh Assembly Government has in its report '*Everybody's business –No-one's Responsibility*' made a number of important recommendations to tackle the problem of Youth homelessness including:

- The Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector should work in partnership to simplify the current complex system of access to and information about the services available to young homeless people.
- Where necessary, provide adequate funding for dedicated homelessness services for young people.
- Issue guidance to local authorities on 'joined up' working on all aspects of youth homelessness both within the local authority and with external partners to

11 Hart, E., (2006) *Youth Homeless Scoping Paper*, Welsh Assembly Government, <http://www.cynulliadcymru.org/c47f2ac6b4726e395a40b310f172f081.pdf> accessed 25th March 2010

12 Wincup, E. (2009) *Addressing Homelessness through Effective Partnership Working*, in R Carnwell & J Buchanan (eds) *Effective Practice in Health, Social Care & Criminal Justice: A partnership approach*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

13 Shelter Cymru (2008) *Building on the past: Ending homelessness in Wales, Conference Report 2008*

14 Wyner (2005) *Working Together with People who are Homeless* R Carnwell & J Buchanan (eds) *Effective Practice in Health & Social Care: A partnership approach*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

increase the amount of cross departmental and multi agency working and improve the service provided to young homeless people.

- The Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities and the voluntary sector should involve service users in all aspects of planning and policy making for services for homeless young people.¹⁵

Recommendations and policy guidelines are important but ultimately they need to be implemented and the benefits experienced at a grassroots level. This research report does not seek to provide a process and outcome evaluation of homelessness services for young people in Wrexham but rather elicits the perceptions and experiences of homeless young people in the area.

Youth homelessness' generally refers to people between the ages of 16-24. A recent report estimates that around 75,000 young people in the UK experience homelessness each year¹⁶. This report found youth homelessness more prevalent among people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and/or those who have experienced disruption or trauma in childhood. There is a strong association between young people who failed to complete their education, employment or training and homelessness¹⁷. Homelessness itself also has a '*negative effect on their mental health and/or contributes to the onset of (or exacerbation of existing) substance misuse problems*'¹⁸.

Substance misuse and alcohol dependence act as both a catalyst for and as a symptom of youth homelessness¹⁹, this group is also a particular concern in respect of the risk of suicide²⁰. Homeless young people with substance misuse problems and possible mental health difficulties (dual diagnosis) present a considerable challenge to services because of the complexity of their legal, health and social needs. Their participation and engagement in society is severely hampered by a lack of employability and difficulty in accessing the welfare support systems²¹.

Many opportunities may have been missed in supporting these young people as children; however adolescence and early adulthood is a crucial stage of development during which young people undergo significant physiological, psychological and social change. It is a transitional stage, fraught with risks, and yet potentially it is one that could offer new possibilities and futures. Developing effective preventative and early intervention strategies is important to give young homeless people the opportunity of a more stable and productive lifestyle before negative experiences and patterns of life

15 Welsh Assembly Government (2006 p.29) *Everybody's Business – No-One's Responsibility, Report on youth Homelessness, Social Justice & Regeneration Committee, Cardiff, WAG,*

16 Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S. & Pleace, N., (2008) *Youth homelessness in the UK, JRF, York*

17 Shelter Cymru (2007) *An Unnatural Disaster: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into homelessness and poor housing conditions in Wales, Swansea*

18 Shelter Cymru (2007) *An Unnatural Disaster: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into homelessness and poor housing conditions in Wales, Swansea (p.36)*

19 Wincup, E., Bayliss, R. & Buckland, G., (2005). *Listening to young homeless problem drug users: Considering the implications for drug service provision. Probation Journal, 52(1), 39-55.*

20 Bickley, H. et al., 2006. *Suicide in the homeless within 12 months of contact with mental health services. Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 41(9), 686-691.*

21 Shelter Cymru (2007) *An Unnatural Disaster: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into homelessness and poor housing conditions in Wales, Swansea*

further undermine their behaviour, relationships, sense of identity and self-esteem. Knowledge and insight arising from research could inform the development of a social care service described in 'Fullfilled Lives, Supportive Communities' which seeks to provide earlier interventions to promote independence and the attainment of a person's full potential.

Early intervention with marginalised and vulnerable young people suffering multiple problems is thought critical to prevent the onset of more entrenched difficulties and patterns of behaviour²². Research with homeless adults with a history of mental health difficulties suggests that greater consideration to their views and perspectives regarding the nature and type of services can result in improved engagement and retention in treatment²³. The importance of dialogue to find the balance between independence and dependence is thought to be the key to improving professional care with homeless youth²⁴. In terms of 'what works' with vulnerable youth, research suggests success largely depends upon the quality of relationship between project staff and the young people²⁵, and that effective and appropriate service delivery require agencies to involve, listen and appreciate the perceptions and experiences of young homeless people.

The UK legal and policy directives that drive service provision for people who are homeless are outlined by Emma Wincup²⁶:

In 2003, the [Homelessness] directorate launched its plans for tackling homelessness. The title of the report 'More than a Roof' reflected its understanding that 'simply putting a roof over someone's head does not always solve his or her homelessness' (Office for the Deputy Prime Minister 2003:). It emphasized the importance of 'joined-up' working at government level and at local authority level and the need for effective partnerships. Two years later, a strategy to tackle homelessness was published entitled 'Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives' (ODPM 2005). This aims to halve the number of households in temporary local authority accommodation by 2010 through a twin-track approach of preventing homelessness and increasing access to settled homes. Potentially this target could encourage local authorities to focus their efforts on tackling homelessness among those they need to provide temporary accommodation for to the detriment of other homeless people. Given the interconnections between homelessness and other aspects of social exclusion, a wide range of government policies could impact upon the lives of homeless people... Launched in 2003, Supporting People is a single programme which draws together housing-related support services to help homeless people, among others, to improve or maintain their ability to live independently. Partnership is judged to be 'paramount' (ODPM 2004c: 6) to the programme.

22 Wincup, E., Bayliss, R. & Buckland, G., (2005). *Listening to young homeless problem drug users: Considering the implications for drug service provision. Probation Journal*, 52(1), 39-55.

23 D. K. Padgett, L. Gulcur, and S. Tsemberis (2006) *Housing First Services for People Who Are Homeless With Co-Occurring Serious Mental Illness and Substance Abuse Research on Social Work Practice*, January 1, 2006; 16(1): 74 - 83.

24 de Winter, M. & Noom, M., (2003). *Someone who Treats you as an Ordinary Human Being ... Homeless Youth Examine the Quality of Professional Care. Br J Soc Work*, 33(3), 325-338

25 Shelter Cymru (2007) *An Unnatural Disaster: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into homelessness and poor housing conditions in Wales, Swansea*

26 Wincup, E. (2009: p132) *Addressing Homelessness through Effective Partnership Working*, in R Camwell & J Buchanan (eds) *Effective Practice in Health, Social Care & Criminal Justice: A partnership approach*, Open University Press, Maidenhead

The need for research

While youth homelessness across the UK has common features, there are regional and local factors that are not fully understood. Substance misuse and mental health needs add further complexity and regional variables. This research examines the needs of a small group of homeless young people (n=20) in Wrexham - the largest town in North Wales. In the recent past, this area has been blighted by the closure of coal mines and factories. As a result of the de-industrialisation, some areas of Wrexham are designated *Communities First* areas and receive regeneration funding from the Welsh Assembly Government. More recently further adjustments have been necessary as the town has also seen a significant influx of migrant workers from southern and eastern Europe. Regeneration continues as the Wrexham is transformed into a major centre for North Wales administration, education, commerce, shopping, culture and industry. This small scale qualitative research study based in Wrexham will explore the ways to improve practice and service delivery to a vulnerable group of young people with complex needs, aged 16-24, who are experiencing homelessness and possibly have mental health difficulties, learning disabilities and/or substance misuse issues.

'Fulfilled, Lives, Supportive Communities' identifies the increased demand on adult mental health services and highlights the need for *'the right service provision at the right time'* suggesting that services need to be *'rebalanced to allow services to be provided earlier, tailored to individual needs and prevent or delay people moving to a higher level of need'*. This research in Wrexham helps to identify how best to support and address the needs of young people who have a high risk of continued homelessness, substance misuse and emotional and social vulnerability into adulthood. Moreover, by adopting an integrated understanding of individual need, it is hoped that the outcomes of the research will inform thinking about how different services might best work together to address the multi-faceted needs of this group. This will inform the drive to increase the effectiveness of limited interventions, improve the quality of life, and reduce further risk.

The research explores the issue of access to services which aim to support young people into independence. As this group of young people are at risk of becoming adults who are highly dependent on social care support in the long term, this research should help to inform and support the agenda for the future of social care which seeks to reduce dependency on services; *'Better educated, better informed and empowered service users, carers and their families, will rightly expect to play a much more active role in managing their own situations. This will help to drive change and innovation'*²⁷

This research utilised the knowledge and expertise of staff and service users from Barnardo's Cymru Compass (the lead agency) who provide care leavers support, housing advice, tenancy support, a Bond Guarantee Scheme and a Drop In service. The research carried out by Glyndwr University used a participative approach in its methodology. Whilst young people did not set the agenda of the research, they played an active part in designing approaches and techniques for accessing the best quality of information. This participative approach reflects the ethos employed by the research lead agency

²⁷ *Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities: A strategy for social services in Wales over the next decade (2007) Welsh Assembly Government.*

Barnardo's Cymru. In its delivery of services via the Wrexham Compass service, Barnardo's Cymru supports the strong agenda for change in social care which sees *'Social Services increasingly becoming a champion and enabler of people's independence'*. With regard to children and families, this is underpinned by the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, whilst 'The Adult Mental Health Strategy' (WAG 2005) sets out its principles of *'equity of access according to individual need; empowering service users and their carers to be closely involved in the planning, development and delivery of services'*

A driver of this research project was to explore how services might work more effectively and seamlessly around the complex needs of this disadvantaged and marginalised group. In this sense, the research explored the way services are currently used by young homeless people, as well as being able to identify what services are needed and when. The participative approach used in this research to ascertain the needs of vulnerable and difficult to reach young people, helps to inform the knowledge base about how best to meet the needs of young homeless people. This service user led approach to research provides rich qualitative data which helps fulfil a central driver in the Welsh Assembly agenda for strategic planning of services to help and support vulnerable adults and children as laid out in 'Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities':

'Enhancing children's citizenship by recognizing them as individuals with rights, entitlements as well as responsibilities, and giving them a voice is the surest way of protecting them from harm and the most effective way of ensuring that welfare provision meets their needs'²⁸.

28 Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities: A strategy for social services in Wales over the next decade (2007) Welsh Assembly Government. (p.13)

Aim of the research

To engage with homeless young people (16-24 year olds) living in the Wrexham area, who have complex needs, in order to ascertain **their** experiences and perceptions of: the needs of homeless young people; the barriers to accessing services; the facilitators to accessing services; and the identification of unmet need.

Objectives of the research

Research Objectives

- 1.** To carry out a literature review in respect of homeless young people to inform the interview schedules and enable theoretical sampling and wider analysis of the findings.
- 2.** To identify what help and assistance homeless young people with multiple difficulties in Wrexham perceive they need.
- 3.** To identify barriers that deter homeless young people with multiple difficulties in Wrexham from seeking the help and assistance they need.
- 4.** To identify the facilitators that encourage homeless young people with multiple difficulties in Wrexham to seek the help and assistance they need.
- 5.** To identify gaps in service delivery for homeless young people with multiple difficulties in Wrexham.
- 6.** To make recommendations for policy and practice in respect of effective service delivery in Wrexham for homeless youth.
- 7.** To produce a summary and full version of the report in electronic format and in hard copy. These reports will be available in Welsh and English.
- 8.** To disseminate the findings broadly to inform knowledge and understanding nationally, across the UK and beyond.

Timetable of work

From	To	Timetable of work
April 09	May 09	Establish Research Advisory Service User Group Develop interview schedules Pilot and refine interview schedules Obtain ethical approval Begin literature review
June 09	July 09	Respondent identification and recruitment Begin Interviewing Complete literature review
Aug 09	Sept 09	Continue interviews Begin transcribing
Oct 09	Nov 09	Complete Interviews Continue and complete transcribing Begin data analysis
Dec 09	Jan 10	Synthesis of findings with literature review Complete data analysis
Feb 10	Mar 10	Write first draft report Finalise, translate and publish report
Apr 10	Ongoing	Dissemination

2. Research Methods

Introduction

The research funded by *Wales Office of Research and Development for Health and Social Care (WORD)* resulted in a partnership between Barnardo's Cymru and Glyndwr University. It also involved young homeless people (aged between 16-24 years old) in a participative qualitative research project to explore their perceptions and experiences of homelessness in Wrexham.

The research explored their perceived needs, and what enabled or deterred them from seeking the help and support they needed. The research team were committed to ensuring the fieldwork could be conducted bilingually (English and Welsh) to ensure respondents were able to participate in their preferred language.

This small scale research project focuses on the views and experience of young homeless people in Wrexham. It is particularly important, for the development of appropriate services, that the voices of this largely hidden group of service users are heard. To this end, the research study explored the perceived needs of this respondent group: their perceptions about what hinders them from seeking help; what encourages them to seek help; their awareness and experiences of services; and any perceived unmet needs. While it is acknowledged that the perspective of service providers is important, it is equally, if not more important, that we listen to the perceptions of young homeless people to ensure their needs and experiences are understood. Given the funding constraints of this small scale study it was not possible to incorporate service provider perspectives - although this could usefully form part of a larger subsequent study.

It is widely recognised that early intervention is crucial with young homeless people before their problems become entrenched. However, homeless young people who are often struggling with significant social and emotional difficulties are vulnerable and hard to reach. This study will improve knowledge and understanding of how best to help at risk young people who are homeless; sleeping rough, temporarily sleeping on the sofas of friends and family or sleeping in night shelters or hostels.

The research involved a small group of homeless young people as an Advisory Group overseeing and advising on the research process. It adopted a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of the young people themselves using in-depth semi structured interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed and then coded using the research objectives as starting points to identify, highlight and categorise emerging themes – this was done systematically and electronically using NVivo software.

The commitment to listen to the voices, experiences and perceptions of the young homeless people enabled the research to facilitate a systematic analysis of their narrative that enabled the young people to 'Tell it as it is'.

Ethical considerations

The Children Act (1989) defines a child as any person under 18 therefore this study was designed to include children as participants. Although we knew of no unique ethical issues in research with children, certain issues tend to arise with greater force or in different ways²⁹. No research participant should be exposed to harm and protecting participants from such harm outweighs any chance of benefit to qualitative research, however, in this research study we assessed the risk of harm as low.

The study conformed to the principle of 'informed consent'³⁰, in that informed consent involved three factors being satisfied. First, the fieldwork was undertaken by those competent to do so. Second, the information about the study was presented to young people in a manner which they could understand and special attention was paid to ensure all the information was accessible and culturally appropriate. Finally, all participants were empowered to be able to decline being interviewed at any stage without incurring negative consequences. Interviews with the young people endeavoured to be sensitive and appropriate to their level of maturity.

The young people were initially accessed through Barnardo's Compass and from this agency a Young People's Advisory Group to act as consultants to the research was established. This group of young people with experience of homelessness passed on information (by word of mouth and by the distribution of written material) to other young people in the area and to the various agencies they had contact with. At a later stage young people were accessed through a range of Wrexham agencies: Barnardo's Cymru Compass; Soup Dragon; Foyer; Hafan; St. John's; and Ty Nos Night Shelter. The agencies were informed of the research and they provided their consent and cooperation. All the interviews took place in a setting and space familiar to the young people so that they were always in a safe place and felt comfortable with trusted workers on the premises. If any person being interviewed wanted to seek help, the research team were able to refer the young people direct to Barnardo's Compass for professional support. This happened on one occasion.

Prior to the interview, participants were asked to sign an interview consent form. The study observed the requirements of the Data Protection Act (1998), which came into effect in March 2000. Prior to proceeding, the full proposal and research instruments were submitted and approved by the Glyndwr University Research Ethics Committee. Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks were carried out on the research team involved in fieldwork and evaluation.

In order to respect and recognise the sacrifice of unpaid time given by the young people who participated in the research study, both as advisors and respondents, a £10 supermarket voucher was provided for each meeting attended and interview provided. To protect the anonymity of the respondents, and ensure no individual can be identified, data from all the fieldwork interviews has been anonymised.

29 Fraser, S. et al. (2004) (Eds.) *Doing Research with Children and Young People*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

30 Sin, C.H., 2005. *Seeking Informed Consent: Reflections on Research Practice*. *Sociology*, 39(2), 277-294.

Sample and methods

The difficult personal histories, complex needs and inter-related social problems which are associated with young people who are homeless means that they can be a 'hard to reach' group. In order to access this group the research team began by utilising the relationships already established by Barnardo's Compass who provide services including a drop in facility for homeless young people in the Wrexham area offering practical support such as free access to a shower, cooker, washing machine, tumble dryer, computer with internet access, printing facilities and telephone, in addition to counselling and support.

This qualitative research sought to ensure the voices of young people were heard. The research was designed to be carried out *with* homeless young people rather than *on* homeless youth. Five young people in need who were between 16-24 years old and known to be homeless or living in temporary accommodation were identified by Barnardo's and invited to form the Research Advisory Group. To establish an effective Advisory Group, time was needed to establish rapport, trust and understanding with an initial group of five homeless young people so they would feel more comfortable and able to advise on all aspects of the field work. Our objective in using this approach was to access comprehensive, high quality data via a facilitated semi structured questionnaire. The findings of which could be explored through focus group work with the Advisory Group. Approximately a dozen Advisory Group meetings were held, although given the frequency and range of difficulties faced by young homeless people it was always difficult getting more than two or three young people to meet at any one time. This group advised the research team on interview schedule design, use of language, access issues, location of interviews and the identification of new recruits for the research. These young people received a £10 supermarket voucher each meeting they attended.

In order to expand and capture a larger group of young homeless people a snowballing sampling technique³¹ was used. Social networks amongst homeless people in the Wrexham seem good although they tend to be centred upon the provision of services available at various times and at different places across the town. It should be acknowledged that this sampling technique is neither random nor can it claim to be necessarily representative of the 16-24 year old homeless population in Wrexham. For populations which are largely hidden it is often a methodological challenge as to how to identify and engage a sample group. Snowballing proved successful initially, but after completing ten interviews the research team struggled to gain access to any further young people. It was hoped from the outset this respondent driven sampling technique would result in at least 15 young people being interviewed using the semi-structured interview schedule. This lack of numbers was explored with the Research Advisory Group and in order to ensure an adequate sample size we decided to increase our sample by purposive sampling. We decided to target those homelessness services used

31 Browne, K., 2005. Snowball sampling: using social networks to research non-heterosexual women. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 8(1), 47.

by youth including The Soup Dragon, Foyer, Hafan, St. John's hostel and Ty Nos Night Shelter, we also wanted to ensure a good representation of male and females while ensuring everyone interviewed was aged 16-24, homeless had complex need. This change in sampling technique meant the research managed to capture the experiences and opinions of a twenty young homeless people in Wrexham from a range of backgrounds and settings, all of whom are currently homeless or living in temporary or unsuitable accommodation and have additional difficulties. Sixteen of the twenty people interviewed had slept rough (one declined to answer), at least two people interviewed were currently sleeping rough, and at least one person had complex need and was not accessing any services.

The semi structured interviews provided rich narrative and personal data. All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed using NVivo software. This process helped to identify emerging dominant themes which were further explored and agreed jointly by the research team and Advisory Group. The digitally recorded interview data and the hand written notes also helped provide important illustrative quotations to contextualise and evidence the claims made in relation to key findings. This study engaged in theoretical sampling³² in that selected themes and categories were compared both within this study and with other relevant empirical research studies. This helped 'test' the interpretations drawn from the data, it generated useful insights and it provided additional support to the findings.

32 Draucker, C.B. et al., 2007. Theoretical Sampling and Category Development in Grounded Theory. Qual Health Res, 17(8), 1137-1148.

3. Results: Demographic Data

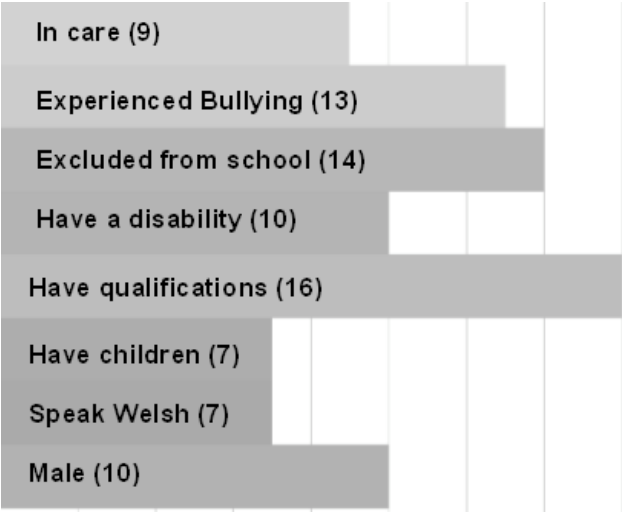
The study comprised of interviewing 20 young people between the ages of 16-24 (n=20) who have experienced homelessness and/or are currently homeless or living in temporary accommodation. Given the real life limitations of reaching and interviewing young homeless people it was not possible to pursue a random sample. Initially a snowballing approach was adopted but as this resulted in lower than expected numbers a purposive sampling process was adopted by contacting known young homeless people at the various locations in Wrexham they frequent. This resulted in a final sample of twenty young:

Background Context	
Average age left school	15.6 years old
Average age first homeless	16.5 years old
Average Age when interviewed	19.3 years old
Nationality:	Welsh (11)
	British (7)
	English (1)
	Not Given (1)
Disabilities/Difficulties specified:	
	ADHD (3)
	Dyslexia (2)
	Mental illness (2)
	Arthritis
	Asberger's syndrome
	Depression
	Learning disability
	Irlen's Syndrome
	Obsessive compulsive disorder
	<i>() Brackets indicate No. of people</i>

Age	No. of young people interviewed in that age range
16	2
17	3
18	2
19	4
20	3
21	2
22	1
23	0
24	2
TOTAL = 19	
One person declined to give this information but was known to be within the age parameters	

The graph below indicates some background experiences of the young people. In common with evidence from established youth homelessness studies the young people in the sample had a history of difficulties prior to their homelessness experience. 50% (n=10) had a disability, 70% (n=14) had difficulty at school and were at some point excluded, 65% (n=13) had been bullied at some point in their life, almost half (n=9) had been looked after by the local authority Social Services Department.

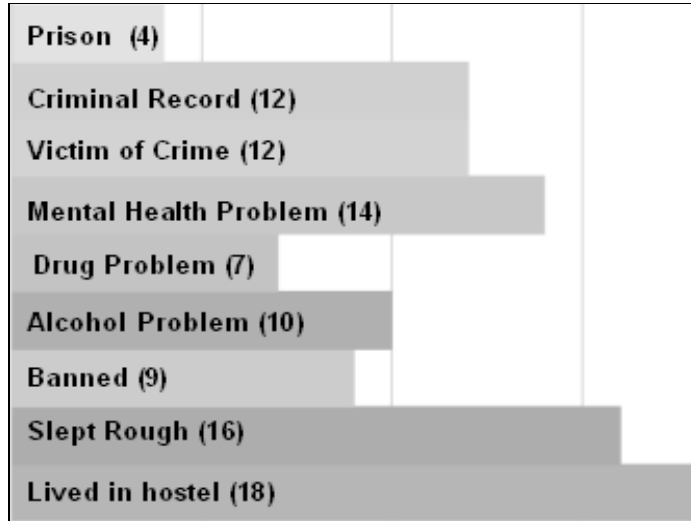
Experiences of young people interviewed (n=20)



The next graph illustrates the extent of negative experiences found amongst the sample. Not unexpected amongst a sample of homeless young people 90% (n=18) had at some point lived in a hostel and 80% (n=16) had slept rough. A matter of concern is that 70% (n=14) of the young people described themselves as having mental health problems.

Over half had been a victim of crime and the same number (n=12) had a criminal record. A significant percentage admitted to problems with alcohol and drugs, 50% (n=10) and 35% (n=7) respectively.

Difficulties faced by young people interviewed (n=20)



Comment

It is evident from the demographic data that the young people interviewed had complex need which included emotional and mental health problems, disabilities, being looked after and being excluded from mainstream education. From the accounts given, accessing services to meet their identified needs became more difficult on becoming homeless; for example, it is harder to obtain employment/education without a permanent address. This is identified in the Social Exclusion Unit Task Force report 'Realising Young Potential and Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (2009)³³. The report indicates that during consultation with young people, 75% of young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) in one area (Norfolk) were living in unsuitable housing such as hostels.

³³ Cabinet Office. (2009). *Realising young potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training.*

4. Results: Context & Experience

Young people who are homeless often have complex need which can include: mental health problems; self harm; family breakdown and conflict; sexual and physical violence in the home; experienced of being looked after by the local authority; close family bereavement and loss; alcohol and drug problems; learning difficulties and isolation. The complex need of the young people interviewed was evident from the interviews and issues relating to their particular needs will be explored. Virtually all the young people interviewed were from Wrexham and the surrounding area. The majority of the respondents were unemployed, (apart from one who had casual employment) and a minority were undertaking educational programmes or undertaking voluntary work, often facilitated and supported by the hostels in which they were placed. Many of the young people had been homeless from a young age: *'I've been homeless since the age of sixteen, always in hostels or on the streets, either one.'* The mean age at becoming homeless for the first time was sixteen and a half years old.

At the outset it was the intention of the researchers to ensure that women (who we anticipated would be a minority group) were properly represented. However, the respective gatekeepers put forward more women than expected and ensuring sufficient numbers of young males proved more of a challenge. In the end the gender balance in the respondent group was equal. There is a general trend of increased visible homelessness for young women, many of whom have traditionally been hidden through 'sofa surfing' and temporary accommodation.

Amongst the young people we interviewed there appeared to be a distinction made between the a) long term older homeless, b) the chaotic substance dependent homeless, and c) the 'new' young temporary homeless – who generally do not like to be referred to as homeless but prefer to be referred to as young people without suitable accommodation. Public perceptions of homelessness and stigma and discrimination will be examined later, although it is pertinent to point out the young people's definition of their own status and position at this stage.

Family background and early life experience

When respondents described what led to them becoming homeless, family breakdown, often following long term difficulties in family relationships, was the explanation in the vast majority of cases, for example:

'...it was just constantly arguing me and my brother and then my parents would take my brothers side and I would be the horrible child and then I just turned around one day and said you don't want me no one else will so I am going. And that was basically what I did.'

Many of the young people had difficult family backgrounds: *'I was like the odd one out really...that's why I got kicked out ... it was just like a certain person you can pick on,*

bully you so much and then you can't take no more and you just lash out and leave, that's all you can do.' Some respondents suggested that tensions with a step-parent within re-constituted families began the onset of their difficulties *'that's when it all started off me and my step-dad not getting on'*. Other young people (n=3) recounted that they had moved to live with grandparents as their parents had not been able to care for them: *'My mum passed away when I was eleven and my dad's a heroin addict'* However, some grandparents appear to have had difficulty managing adolescent behaviour, as illustrated by one young person who explained: *'I used to drink a lot and my grandparents couldn't cope so they threw me out'*

Often, young people managed to stay with various family members or friends before becoming homeless: *'my mum put me into a hostel when I was 16 but before that I started moving through family ... I was 13 the first time I moved out.'* Other young people described difficulties at home which contributed to them presenting challenging behaviour:

Because my brother was disabled he took up a lot of my mum and dad's time I used to get bullied for it at school as well so part of it was trying to be the hard man if you know what I mean so that people would back off and leave me alone and it landed me in a whole load of crap basically.

Two respondents had to leave home as one or both parents did not accept their sexuality: *'I lived with my parents and I told them that I was gay. My dad didn't accept it so I kind of ran off to [NAME].'*

Almost half of the young people had been looked after by the local authority (n=9), some had been in long term foster care or residential homes, others had experienced short periods of living with foster parents or respite foster care: *'I got put in foster care when I was 14 because my mum said I was a troubled child, naughty and what have you.'* The young people described differences in the after care services they had received from the local authority; another young person explained why she had been refused after care services *'And they said no because you weren't in permanent, you were only in temporary.. Because I went back to my dad's and I weren't in full foster care that they wouldn't, weren't able to help me so from 16 I've been in hostels and what have you, and because of all the stress and what have you I turned to drink so I was getting kicked out of everywhere.'*

Life experiences

It was apparent from the accounts of the young people that they had experienced trauma in their lives which included bereavement, domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse, neglect and rejection. Some respondents gave accounts of physical abuse within the home: *'I had a rum stepdad who used to beat me up and that and then lost all the confidence, I gained it and then that's where the fighting come in'* another respondent described domestic violence within his home *'My mum used to get beaten up by my dad every day, so I was always getting on the wrong and I used to get hit instead.'*

The interviews with the young people included accounts from both male and female respondents of being victims of sexual abuse (n=4) both as a child and sexual exploitation while homeless. For some young people, sexual abuse had led to them becoming homeless: *'my grand-dad used to sexually abuse me ... my Nana didn't believe me what had happened so I don't speak to her. That's why I don't speak to nobody in my family.'* It was clear from respondent accounts that some young people had sex to secure a bed for the night, for example, as one young person explained *'I did it a lot of times where I would just go to a pub and find some man and just so it was somewhere to sleep'*. Young people without support or social capital described having to sell their bodies to cope with finding themselves homeless. One young person we interviewed spoke about an experience of child sexual exploitation when aged 13 homeless in a strange city. In order to secure sufficient funds for food and shelter given the constrained choices this young person felt they had little option except to sell her/his body to an adult. This adult subsequently recruited other adults who perpetuated the sexual abuse and exploitation of this young person.

One respondent suggested that young people could be vulnerable to sexual exploitation in mixed hostels and disagreed with mixed provision: *'I think that it's wrong to be honest as quite a few people you know do sleep around once they are in there ...a lot of girls do end up like pressurised into it and end up pregnant you know or have got something.'*

A quarter of the young people had lost one or both parents (n=5) and this contributed to them becoming looked after by the local authority: *'I ended up in Foster care because my dad died. My mum died when I was little so I couldn't go back to her and I went to foster care and I really didn't like it so I just ran away.'* Other young people had experienced close family bereavement; one young person made a link between the ability to cope with a particular loss: *'my cousin, I found him hanging when I was nine then so that's what's, I think that's what's led to bad behaviour.'*

School

The majority of young people talked about difficult experiences in school, and almost three quarters of respondents had experienced school exclusion (n=14). Some respondents reflected on the reasons why: *'It's because I used to have an anger problem...people used to try and wind me up* and another stated: *'I was like really young I was fighting all through high school, and I went from one school to the other.'* For other respondents the academic focus of mainstream education did not suit their learning style: *'School was a bit of a tough one - I never used to basically learn anything, just couldn't sit there all the time, I was more of a practical person in school, I didn't like sitting down and doing the writing.'* A similar number of young people (n=13) indicated that they were bullied in school: *'I got bullied at school because of my size because I was actually quite small at school'* another stated: *'I always used to get bullied...because I was in a wheelchair...I was slower than everyone else...I was different.'*

Comment

Most young people in this study had grown up in families where their parents/carers had their own difficulties to cope with. Therefore, many of the young people did not benefit from a secure childhood environment as a foundation to mature and develop. What is also interesting is that some of the young people blamed themselves when their parents or carers *'couldn't cope'* defining themselves as a *'problem child'*. Almost half of the young people had been looked after by the local authority (n=9) on both a long term and short term basis. The Social Exclusion Unit Task Force report *'Realising Young Potential and Supporting Care Leavers into Education, Employment and Training (2009)*³⁴ identifies that care leavers with significant support needs are in greater need of effective co-ordinated intervention, without which they risk increased disadvantage. The report identifies the high risk groups as young people with mental health problems, learning difficulties, emotional and attachment difficulties, substance misuse, young offenders and young parents- such needs were manifested in the respondent group.

³⁴ *Cabinet Office. (2009) Realising young potential: supporting care leavers into education, employment and training.*

5. Results: Perceived Needs

It is apparent from the respondent accounts that much of the young people's time is spent trying to ensure that basic human needs are met such as; securing food, shelter, warmth, hygiene, support and friendship. Interestingly, because the young people have no fixed geographical location mobile phones play a vital role in maintaining communication between themselves and those agencies and individuals who are able to offer basic support.

Practical: Independent living skills

Almost half (n=9) of the young people interviewed identified having difficulty with independent living skills as an important issue. Moreover, they are without the family support that many other young people rely on during the transitional stage between living at home and living independently. One respondent articulated the point about challenges with regard to learning to live independently:

A lot of them have come from home or they have been in care for years so have never had to do anything for themselves, some of them do not know how to use a washing machine or how to cook a meal or how to iron, ... some people don't even know how to wash properly you know it's just life skills, it's things people take for granted every day some people don't even have a clue of that.

Hence, some young people talked about particular difficulties they had faced, like one respondent who described trying to understand the system of paying for utilities when she moved into a flat: *'my friend had to come around last night to sit in the dark because I couldn't get my head around how this quarterly thing works and how much I am going to use and how I control it and stuff like that.'* This was echoed by another young person: *'you do you need help with...sorting out your TV licence, your water, your electricity, your gas because when you move into a place you don't understand all thatand even knowing what days your bin goes out because you move into a place and you are too shy to talk to your neighbours.'* Although, tenancy support can in certain circumstances be offered by the Housing Office and Barnardo's Cymru Compass a number of young people still felt they lacked the support they needed. One young person explained: *'I wish someone would have taught me to pay bills and stuff, you know, maybe like debt advice and maybe like preparing for bills and stuff budgeting and debt advice.'* It was apparent from the accounts of the respondents that the hostels support the residents to develop independent living skills which are valued by the young people. A number of respondents conveyed how helpful they found this practical support: *'they help you wash and cook your food, so you know how to cook...you're allocated with a support worker here and basically they'll arrange a day for you to cook and that day you'll cook and they'll judge how they think you got on.'*

One respondent described how she had tried to live independently but had returned to the hostel in order to gain support with independent living skills: *'I went to Homeless and I told them that I didn't want to live where I was living [an unsuitable B&B], so I asked them can I move into a hostel so they can give me some help like, you know, parenting skills and budgeting, so I moved into Hafan.'* Another young person

demonstrated understanding of how the skills provided at the hostel could help young people to move on in their lives including finding a place to live and possibly securing employment: *'I think the way Hafan and Foyer have got this programme running, I think it does prove to the council that they're trying their hardest to try and basically build themselves up get a job and hopefully move on to their own place...'*

Practical: Support for young parents

Some of the young people that were interviewed are parents (n=7). Two of the young people gave accounts of being offered accommodation that they did not find suitable for a baby. The detailed experience recounted by one young person (below) illustrates clearly the struggle and frustration of a young parent trying in difficult circumstances to secure satisfactory accommodation for herself and her baby:

I went back [to the Housing Office] about two days later and I was in tears and I said look I need to see somebody it's not fair on my son you know, he is sleeping on a sofa I am sleeping on a sofa I feel like I am invading my friends house and if I don't get somewhere tonight then I don't know what I am going to do ..they said come back at 4pm and we will have keys for you to a B&B and you will be there for about 2 weeks until we can find you somewhere to stay permanently. So I went back I didn't know what to expect I didn't know you know anything but I thought at least I have got a room for me and [NAME] to stay tonight and when I went back they gave me the keys and explained where it was they weren't much help explaining where it was they just said it was on [NAME]and you will see it, there were no signs or anything to say what it was they just said that I was to go into [NAME of B&B]and tell them that you were here from the council and to show you your room. So I went up there and I was nervous and a bit upset and I thought well I have got a room and they showed me and said this is it, it looked like just a house just with no garden sort of .. and when I went into the room, they showed me in and straight away it was filthy it was horrible it wasn't nice at all and I didn't actually know until the last minute that I was sharing with two older men in this house that I didn't know ... the stairs were really steep for a start so we would have to stay in that room where we were....The room itself wasn't nice at all the bed sheets were filthy, luckily my friend gave me some fresh ones, it just didn't smell nice there wasn't a nice smell to it the carpet was disgusting and all I had with me was a travel cot for [NAME] and obviously his steriliser to do his bottles and when I went into the room I just burst out crying when they left me and I thought what a bad mum am I to, for me and [NAME] to stay here because I couldn't get a place because I wasn't trying hard enough to get a place even though I was trying hard enough I was doing everything I could, so I was there for one night I slept there...it was like a big shared house and your room is your room and the rest is shared, the kitchen the bathroom so the bathroom was not nice it was quite dangerous like the, you know where you normally have a bath panel there was nothing you could just go underneath the bath and all the pipes and everything were there and I found out that I was actually sharing the accommodation with an ex convict who had gone down for Arson and someone else who had been in prison and we didn't find out what for and I didn't really want to stay to find out what for. I was just sharing a house with two men... as soon as I found out I was sharing a house with two men you know I wasn't judging them before I met them but what I had heard about them I didn't want my son near, you know me on myself I could have handled but not with a 6 month old baby because I was sterilizing his bottle in the kitchen and you are supposed to leave them in the fridge and I thought how do I know I can trust these men not to put anything in them, when you have got a child you think of all these things and you worry ...three weeks the council said we have realised that accommodation we have put you in isn't suitable for you and a 6 months old baby ...so we are going to move you so I thought that is good thank god. They said it is only going to be a 28 day flat and then as soon as that is over we will find you a place so they gave me some more keys and explained where to go and I went there and it was absolutely awful again it wasn't the cleanest of places, there was a lot of drug addicts that lived on this estate I had an alcoholic who lived next door to me who would just walk in the flat if I didn't lock the door and start talking to me so again I didn't want [NAME]there so you know I was staying there on my own and my mum would have [NAME] and you know, I hated t because he was my son and I wanted to be with him but I didn't want him there and one night when I was sleeping someone tried to open my door it must have been about 3am and they were banging down the door and I was absolutely terrified because I knew that there was a lot of people that were on drugs there and things like that so, and finally after just a month of being there and as much as I could take I went to the council and said look this isn't suitable either you are putting me in places where

me and my son are at risk really I don't want my son around people like that you should put me in safer places even the Foyer would have been you know a bit more safer because I was on my own there whereas in the Foyer you have got that help around you.... it was awful and I never want anyone to go through what I went through because it is scary and you know especially how young I was only 19 years old and terrified of everything and you are always paranoid when you have got a child anyway but being so young you are even worse I think and more vulnerable to things like that.

Practical: Improving employability

As highlighted above, all except one of the respondents were without work at the time of the interviews. It was apparent from the young people's accounts that securing employment was important to them but this was difficult to achieve due to their circumstances. The respondents that were living in hostels talked about difficulties they had securing employment. An important issue that they raised was the stigma surrounding using the hostel as an address, like ONE YOUNG PERSON who said '*... as soon as jobs see that you are living in a hostel on an application form they don't even bother.*' A similar point was made by another young person: '*you've got to be ... I would say very lucky, to have another address to put down. ...this place has never had the best reputation. It's not a bad place, it's a really nice place, really nice people, but because people have had problems with people from here...it makes life very difficult for people now to get a job.*' This young person noted that the voluntary organization Shelter have provided a service to try to overcome this problem '*... if you go down to Shelter Cymru and you're between the age of 16 to 25 you can use their address to apply for jobs. I found that out yesterday, so that is not very well advertised.*'

Without the basic need of accommodation being met, it was apparent, for example from the following account that it was almost impossible to secure education, training or employment: '*I can't get a job because I haven't got an address and I don't know where I am going to be sleeping or anything like that so I can't get a job like I go to Careers Wales near enough every day Monday to Friday, see what courses they've got and they're like oh you need accommodation, where are you living and I'm like oh, night shelter and that's not acceptable, you can't join anything until you sort yourself out so I can't do nothing really until I sort myself out.*'

The majority of the young people who were living in the hostels, or who had lived in hostels previously, conveyed how much they valued the support provided there in relation to education and training, as illustrated by one respondent who spoke about a support worker: '*she has helped me get qualifications ...and different credits and stuff ...and she is trying to help me get work and everything.*' However, two respondents suggested that there is a 'Catch 22' situation regarding being employed when living in the hostels as although they wanted to work, this had a significant impact on what they had to pay towards their keep. It was suggested that having a job could make it more difficult to move on to independent accommodation: '*it is hard enough to try and get a place, because if you are working full time the rent for this place is unbelievable They take 70p in every pound off you because housing benefit won't pay it...but I'd rather be working, because I've always worked, because I hate being out of work, because you just get lazy, you get used to it.*'

Practical: Securing a more stable lifestyle

None of the young people interviewed wanted to be homeless. Many were forced out of stable accommodation due to extreme pressures or circumstances beyond their control. Homelessness could not be described as a rational choice or best option for any of the young people interviewed: *'I didn't choose to be homeless. No one really can choose to be homeless.'* A common theme emerging from all the interviews was that the young people were keen to move on in their lives, engage in education and/or employment and obtain settled, permanent accommodation. For those young people who were currently living or had previously stayed in hostels (n=18), the support they were receiving was helping them towards these aims: *'They got a training officer ... most hostels don't have one... see what you want in life, what you like and he's here Monday to Friday, and sometimes he shoots off to different hostels, to help other people out ... So I'm not messing up this time, I really want it'*. Similar views were expressed by another young person who recounted *'Since being in St John's it has opened a lot more doors to getting my own place to go into college ...I'm planning on going to college'* while another respondent explained: *'It's only because I am living in Hafan....If I was still living in the B&B now there was no hope ..I just want to achieve my goals now'*.

Health and well being: Healthy eating

An issue that emerged from a minority of respondents' accounts was that they were unable to develop health eating patterns as they had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation without cooking facilities, like one young person who described the limited cooking facilities that were available: *'I get my money, £10 a day for food.. I have got my own microwave out of my first homes grant and a mini fridge....I can do jacket potatoes ... too many takeaways.'* A similar concern regarding healthy eating was expressed by another respondent who had lived in hostel accommodation: *'half of them don't eat properly. They live off those 10p super noodles from Tesco and Asda. ...a lot of them would rather go and take the pain away rather than living in a place like that and just go and get a bottle of vodka or something like that...'*

Health and well being: Drugs and alcohol

During the interviews, some of the young people indicated that they had a problem with drugs (n=7) and alcohol (n=10). Only one young person felt that an alcohol problem was the cause of becoming homeless: *'if I hadn't have been drinking heavily I would probably never have become homeless in the first place.'* More commonly, respondents described using alcohol and/or drugs as a way of coping with problems. Most young people described using drugs and/or alcohol as a reaction to, or symptom of, homelessness:

They placed me there and then I started with the drinking the drugs, because I had nobody left in my family so it was like do you want some drugs? Yeah, do you want a drink? Yeah, everything that was offered to me I would take, and that was when I started getting in trouble with the police and now look, I'm only 19 and I've been to jail five times ...they said stop the drinking the drugs and then maybe, but it's not that easy when you've got nowhere to live, boredom more than anything. I've taken every drug that you can imagine, heroin, crack, weed, ecstasy, speed the lot, everything, and then I get that drunk because I'm bored or upset or whatever, I drink that much I can't remember what I've done. Well I drink everyday as it is from the moment I wake up but that's what caused it when I started with the drink and the drugs.. I don't know it blocks things out, it helps you. When you're drunk or on drugs you don't care where you sleep, so it's easier

to get drunk and wake up in the morning and think oh god, and you get another drink so you don't care then you forget.

Some respondents talked about using drugs and or alcohol to cope with rough sleeping: *what made me through the nights was like beer, really, you know that's helped me a lot* and as another respondent amplified: *'Drugs that's my god at the end of the day...It's easier to sleep, get smashed out of your face. Lie down fall asleep, even how cold it was in the middle of the winters'*. Other young people valued the support that had been provided in relation to coping with drugs and alcohol difficulties both in the community and in the hostels: *'Sometimes you have a risk assessment like involving alcohol, drugs and if you want help getting off drugs, there's always like, they've got DIP [Drugs Interventions Programme] and all that, there's always lots of help. You've got all them places when you're finding it hard, you can go to them places.'*

However, respondents who were newly homeless distanced themselves from the older, established homeless, particularly separating themselves from problem drug and alcohol users. It was apparent that some young people would not access services that they believed problem drug and alcohol users utilized. This was illustrated in several accounts: *'Now [NAME] was a brilliant place, it was an alright place to live but the problem was that I have got a serious no drug policy, I can't stand drugs around me or drug users because of my uncle died at the age of 20 through drugs so that's a big no, no for me and having people knocking my door at 5 in the morning off their heads on drugs was upsetting for me because I could not stand it and I was getting that depressed I was trying to take my life.'* A similar view was echoed by another young person who highlighted this issue in relation to particular voluntary sector services: *'a lot of people don't go because it is mainly heroin addicts, street homeless, older people that go not the specific 16 to 25 year olds, anybody can go so a lot of people get put off by the sort of people that do go there, even though they are in the same situation they still judge other people.'* This young person suggested the following explanation: *'unfortunately the majority of the people that you see around the town that are homeless are addicts of one form or another and I think they're sort of scared, they fear them, scared that they might get into trouble with them.. a lot of them their problems started when they were younger I think and generally that scares younger people, yes I think a lot of people see that that could be them in a few years time.'*

Health and well being: Emotional and mental health

Almost three quarters of the young people described experiencing mental health problems (n=14). The problems included Depression, Psychosis, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) and self harm and many of these concerns were apparent before the onset of homelessness. A quarter of the respondents talked about suicide attempts they had made (n=5). Some of the respondents described experiencing mental health problems during their childhood, and receiving support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) *'I tried to commit suicide and they put me in hospital and I had to go there every week after that until I was 18'* [since the age of 11]. A similar description of mental health problems during childhood was mentioned by another young person:

'I have got ADHD, Psychosis, Schizophrenia and Irlen's syndrome...Well no one knew what it was because have had mental issues since I was a kid. I would flip out at the slightest thing...they could not cope with me. I was high risk because I was a major self harmer... basically I wanted to kill myself I just wanted to end everything I went into hospital ...it was very helpful [rehab] if it weren't for those 12 months I don't know where I would be now, I would probably still be at the bottom of a gutter somewhere and dead.'

Some young people linked their mental health problems with being homeless, like the following respondent, who made a link between the way the public treat homeless people and depression: *'...it's the attitude towards the homeless people from a wide variety of people, that's what I think makes it harder for people because it's like putting them down in a way so then they don't feel as confident and that's when other people start drinking as well because of confidence and that's when people start getting depressed.'*

One of the respondents indicated that the GP shared the opinion that being homeless was directly linked to depression: *'I'm due to have counselling because my doctor's referred me, ... the depression has only come since I've been homeless, and the doctor classes it as severe. And he's the one that wrote a letter to the council.'*

It emerged from a number of accounts that the stress of being homeless contributed to mental health problems, including self harming, as one young person recounted *'I lived on the streets for a year and a half doing drugs and stuff I was in the hospital for a week and that, because I took an overdose because I couldn't cope anymore'* and another young person, who had recently had a temporary ban from the night shelter for self harming while staying there explained: *'...I done something stupid, I went to hospital and what have you, but I'm allowed back tomorrow, I've been in hospital I have... I self harmed in there ...and because they said I was a risk to them and a risk to myself so... well they wanted to keep me in but I ran away because I was a bit scared like...I've took overdoses in the past..'*

Some respondents were receiving services from mental health professionals:

'I'm still having counselling now I'm still having my CAMHs group ...and I'm getting better now and I don't feel as stressed or suicidal any more obviously because I have got my little home and I'm getting a lot of support off Social Service and Barnardos ... but I was in a very emotional state to begin with though as I said I nearly killed myself and 300 tablets in my system, it was only for one of the staff at [NAME] finding me because they had to do a room check and I didn't know that they have to do that and they found me on the floor.'

It was apparent from the accounts that some respondents found the mental health interventions they had received as beneficial, as illustrated by one young person who spoke positively about the support received from the Elms, despite having difficulty accessing the service initially: *'Because I've been homeless...,it was actually quite hard for me to get a doctor, then I found out about the Elms as well and I've actually had*

support off the community nurse from there- that's actually helped me get my medication.'

Comment

All the young people interviewed expressed that they wanted a more stable lifestyle. Securing permanent accommodation that met their needs was seen as a priority. However, some young people described being placed in unsuitable accommodation, which was particularly problematic for young parents. Many of the young people had not had an opportunity to develop skills needed to live independently, like meal planning, hygiene and budgeting. The support given by the hostels to develop independent living skills was valued by the young people. The young people all aimed to be engaged in employment or education and training, although being without permanent accommodation presented considerable challenges to achieving this aim. The Social Exclusion Unit report 'Transitions: Young People with Complex Needs'³⁵ identified that vulnerable young people, including care leavers, lack the social networks and social capital necessary to enable them to make informed choices about their future. Again, the support given by the hostels, including provision of a training officer, was viewed as helpful by the young people.

The health and well being of the young people was of concern on a number of levels. Some young people lacked the facilities or the knowledge to prepare healthy food, and over a third indicated that they had a problem with drug misuse (n=7) and half described being problem alcohol users (n=10). In addition, almost three quarters of the young people described experiencing mental health problems (n=14), with a quarter indicating that they had made suicide attempts (n=5). These issues raise important concerns about both the immediate and long term physical and emotional health needs of the young people, and the level of risk to their health that their lack of suitable accommodation exacerbates.

35 Social Exclusion Unit (2005) Transitions. Young People with Complex Needs. London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister;

6. Results: Barriers to Accessing Services

All of the respondents interviewed conveyed that they had experienced barriers to accessing services. For the purposes of the report, the barriers have been separated into systemic barriers and personal experiences of stigma and discrimination

Systemic barriers: Knowledge of services

It was evident from the majority of respondent accounts that young people did not know what services were available and how to access them. Therefore, a significant barrier exists at the first point of contact when a young person needs to access support on becoming homeless. Moreover, when they did find out about services, they were already in a crisis situation: *'The main thing is for people to know where help is available for them because it is not that well known about the services that are available until you are actually up to your knees in it as it were'*. A similar view was expressed by another young person, who said *'Maybe society coming to the homeless rather than the homeless going to them... Not all homeless people know about everything.'*

Some respondents recognized that young people were particularly vulnerable in this regard: *'I think they are more scared and unsure what is happening and maybe don't know what help is available for them, it's not very well known, a lot of people don't know about Shelter a lot of people don't know about Compass, trying to go looking for help and not knowing where to go and feeling that people were going to judge you. Thinking well it's your own fault or whatever...I am quite comfortable to go there and tell them about my problems and ask for help but a few years ago I wasn't and I think a lot of people are in the same situation because they don't know what is going to happen.'* A similar view was expressed by another respondent: *'...they don't know where places to go, most kids say about 16 they don't know they have only just come out of school...how do they know they are living on the streets and that but they haven't got no one to go to.'*

It was apparent from the accounts of some young people that they had learnt about services from other young people who were in similar situations. Hence one young person explained:

Quite a lot of my friends are with Barnardos so they introduced me to them because I was finding it very difficult to get a place..I don't think that Barnardo's is as well advertised as it should be I think that the council should tell young people about it and the Wales and West should tell young people about it but I suppose they are not going to because Barnardo's are quite annoying to them they are like bloody hell it's that one from Barnardo's again we had better get her a house.

This was echoed by another young person who talked about the support received from people who were street homeless, and described *'Learned more from people on the street. They are like, because me and [NAME] are young they take us under their wing and you know help us and tell us what you have to do and things like that.'*

Systemic barriers: Negotiating the Housing Office

The young people explained that in order to access services from the local authority on becoming homeless, they needed to attend the Local Authority Housing Department Homelessness service. All of the young people described negative experiences and or feelings towards the housing department. A common theme emerging from the interviews was that the young people perceived that they were viewed in a negative light by front line staff in the homeless section. Hence, one respondent gave the following account:

Sometimes I would go in there in tears saying that I need a place can I speak to someone and they weren't very nice really I think they just thought oh here is another one she just wants a place so she is going to turn on the water works but I was desperate.

Another young person said *'when you are speaking to them sometimes they make you feel uneasy because they speak down to you; I find it very hard to speak to the council about problems with housing and stuff...When I come out I feel like awkward and I feel like upset sometimes, I won't go on my own most of the time I take one of my mates with me.'* Hence, some respondents talked about not feeling listened to: *'The council they don't listen...if they don't listen then they won't understand.'* This was in contrast to many of the young people's experiences of the services in the voluntary sector which will be explored later. Continuing on this theme, some young people talked about becoming frustrated in the Housing Offices and losing control, as explained by one respondent who said, *'I don't like it, I'm banned from there.'*

It was apparent from the accounts of the young people that they are required to explain why they have become homeless which requires imparting personal information about what are usually distressing circumstances. It emerged that what the young person say is important, because the Housing Department need to determine whether young people have made themselves 'intentionally homeless', and thus, would not be eligible for accommodation.

Some young people shared examples of having difficulty explaining their situation to the housing office, although they realized that how they explained their situation had important consequences in terms of the receiving services: *'It depends on how they explain their situation...they can't just go in there and say oh look I'm homeless. They will say what do you want us to do about it? they don't know what to say or don't want to say it.'* Some of the young people talked about difficulty in sharing personal information, particularly when the situation, often family breakdown:

Because I moved out because my mum kicked me out, I had problems basically I didn't know what to say to them and they didn't understand me, so I had to take my [Barnardo's] Compass worker with me so she could vouch for me .. it was difficult though for me because I have got Dyslexia and I couldn't put my point across to her and she wanted me to speak for myself and I said I do speak for myself but I am sitting here listening and I said fair enough but she kept on butting in .. the housing woman. After that I was just like, I kept my cool but it is hard because you have got a worker and the worker knows how much stress I was under but she still wanted to hear from me ... It's hard to speak to her because she is looking down at you'

Hence, having the support of a worker was viewed as important during these interviews by some respondents:

For young people, younger than me it will be harder for them because they have to vouch for themselves. They have got no one ... if I didn't have them with me [Compass worker] I would have just walked out and made myself intentionally homeless but because they were there to vouch for me I was fine... Most young people or older people haven't got the support they haven't got anybody to take with them they have to go on their own they are probably terrified like I was but I had someone with me but I was still terrified.

Systemic barriers: Help beyond the age of eighteen

Many respondents talked about how they were able to obtain help up until the age of eighteen, although when they reached eighteen, it was harder to receive help from the Housing Department. This is a consequence of eligibility definitions in the homelessness legislation in terms of priority need and vulnerability. A theme emerging from the interviews was the much reduced provision from the local authority when they became eighteen. Respondents spoke about statutory provision: *'If I was 16-18 I'd say yeah, it's good but when I'm over 18 it's not, it's a horrible place... They just won't accept you, they give you an interview, waste your time ... that's all they do. The council's no help around here.'* This was echoed by another respondent who said:

I'm homeless got nowhere to live, the council; because you're over 18 they won't help you which I think is wrong really because at the end of the day you're still quite young. I'm only 19 and they should help you., the council need to help a bit more, they just won't listen, I'm either on the streets or in the night shelter... from the age of sixteen to eighteen they have to house you and that's the only reason that they do, as soon as you turn eighteen they don't want to know, it's like you're on the waiting list, get out...you've got to get this many points you've got to do this, you've got to do that and it's useless all of it.

Some respondents highlighted that that this was an issue that should be addressed: *'I think it's wrong with the fact that when they are 18 they are expected to stand on their own two feet and struggle their way through life and there's children you know out there who are living at home with their parents until they are about 27 you know, so that is something I would be looking at - expanding the service from 18 to 21. I think at 18 you are just generally starting your life.'* Continuing on this theme, some young people talked about the system of prioritization in the Housing Department:

We've been homeless about 2 months now and we've been there about 20, 30 times... the help outside the council is good but the council- not good at all. They don't even care, no, their body language and the way they speak to you, like saying you're not priority, we don't have to do anything for you...Quite arrogant.

Some respondents described having difficulty gaining help from the statutory services. Moreover, she echoed comments made earlier regarding having to disclose sensitive information at the point of trying to access a service for the first time:

It is difficult to actually get help from the organizations...you can't just walk into social services and say right I want a social worker I need help I want help getting a place of my own, you can't do that, you actually have to go there and speak to them and tell them all about your past and stuff like that which is hard speaking about your past as not many people can talk about their pasts to other people so it is hard, some like organisations are hard accessing to get in to I would say Social Services but some are pretty easy, like Barnardo's are absolutely fabulous.

It was evident from many of the respondent accounts that a significant barrier to accessing services surrounds the definition of 'intentionally homeless'. This definition is open to interpretation and if rigidly applied could mean the difference between getting help or not. One young person explained:

They keep taking me off the list because I got kicked out of one of the hostels for not keeping my room tidy because I was really [clinically] depressed at the time...they are classing me as making myself intentionally homeless. They are trying to get me out of the hostel and Shelter are helping me appeal against it at the moment so they can't kick me out until they have come up with a conclusion if they are going to class me as intentionally homeless or not...I was living in a safe house in [NAME] and I had to move out because I was getting bullied and because I moved out they classed me as intentionally homeless because apparently I made myself homeless by moving out.

The issue of leaving care provision was raised by some young people - to re-iterate, almost half of respondents had experienced being looked after by the local authority (n=9). The Children (Leaving Care Act) 2000 extends the local authority's responsibility to provide accommodation to 17 and 18 year olds who have been in care for 13 weeks in the 2 years before their 16th birthday. Not meeting the criteria for aftercare support was identified by some young people: *'I went back to social services to ask if they'd be able to help. And they said no because ...they said you weren't in permanent, you were only in temporary ...so from 16 I've been in hostels and what have you, and because of all the stress and what have you I turned to drink so I was getting kicked out of everywhere ...I went to the council yesterday and they said I can't help you because you're 18 you're not priority.'*

Continuing on this theme, the issue of reduced support once a young person reaches 18 emerged in some accounts:

After I have turned 18 social services cannot pay my rent anymore so I am going to have to pay the difference. Which is like a £100 a month which is quite a lot of money to me... the social services think that they are helping but they just don't ...at the end of the day even my social worker says she is busy ...she has got many other priorities and it's like... I was talking about houses the biggest priority to me ...so I just don't think that they have got enough time really for you.

Personal experience of stigma and discrimination

The young people in the sample recalled varying degrees of hostility they had suffered as a consequence of being homeless; this included physical assaults, ridicule and discrimination. It was apparent from the accounts of the respondents that many of the

young people have low self esteem which is exacerbated by the stigma and treatment of being homeless: *'I class homelessness as hitting rock bottom there is, you can't get any further down the line than being homeless to be honest'*. This was echoed by another young person who perceived being viewed as: *'vermin, scum, basically I had so many names called at me for living under a bridge ...I hated it I just hated life ... I just wanted to get out of society. I was rock bottom anyway. I couldn't get anywhere further.'*

Some respondents talked about a loss of confidence resulting from their situation, like ONE YOUNG PERSON, who said *'I struggle with my depression... and the main other thing is confidence and things like that and the staff where I live are trying to get me on a confidence building course as well at the moment.'* Some of the young people described themselves as having difficulties with anger management. Hence respondents described situations that had arisen due to this problem: *'Anger... I deal with it in my own way not talking about it, it makes me feel worse...When you talk about things I get wound up about it'* another explained: *'...it's just people when they wind me up I don't know I can't keep my feelings to myself I just kick off in the end, I try and try and try then in the end I just kick off.'*

Public perceptions of homelessness

The majority of young people have experienced assaults, name calling and discrimination at being homeless; they feel stigmatised and rejected by the general public. It was apparent from the accounts of the young people that many of them do their best to hide any indication of being homeless. A number of the young people made use of the good range of supportive services available in Wrexham - such as the opportunity to shower and wash clothes which can be difficult to access in other towns and cities. This helped young homeless people in Wrexham maintain personal dignity and well-being, but it also helped prevent others from identifying them as homeless: *'you can be homeless but you can still dress smart. If you dress like a tramp then it is your own fault, there is always somewhere to wash your clothes and get a shower. ...If you act like someone on the streets you are going to get a name for yourself aren't you.'* As the above data suggests, some young people were keen to avoid the stigma of being homeless and other understood that homeless people were stereotyped negatively: *'I think it's the fact that a lot of them are worried they are going to get stereotyped. When people hear the word homeless and young people they tend to think drug addict'*. This was echoed by another respondent:

Well I think a lot of them who need housing to look at them you wouldn't know that they were homeless because they still wear relatively decent clothes or whatever and they are not unwashed or anything like that. We went to meet an assembly minister a couple of weeks ago and I think she sort of summed it up straight away because as soon as we said that we worked doing a project with 16 to 25 year olds that were homeless, she said oh I'm assuming they all have substance misuse issues or criminal records and stuff and I think that is how probably most people would view it that it is their own fault that they have gotten into drugs or crime or whatever and that's why they are homeless and that's why they can't be housed when in some circumstances it is true but the majority of the time it isn't and it's just trying to get people to wake up and see that not everybody that's homeless is a druggie or a criminal... but it can go either way, sometimes it can be positive as well as, I say positive, they sort of pity you which sometimes can be worse than being indifferent because you don't want people pitying you all the time but sometimes it's like oh he is a waste of space.

It was clear from some respondents' accounts that the way they were viewed and treated by members of the public had a negative impact on their emotional health:

Well it's the attitude towards the homeless people from a wide variety of people, that's what I think makes it harder for people because it's like putting them down in a way so then they don't feel as confident and that's when other people start drinking as well because of confidence and that's when people start getting depressed.

Some young people suggested that there was distancing and a lack of understanding from the public generally, for instance:

They definitely put a stamp on them saying oh he's a druggie or he's and alchy or whatever, definitely ... but if they've never been in the situation themselves they can't really judge and I say that to people and they go you've been homeless and it's like well yeah, but for a reason. A similar view was expressed by ONE YOUNG PERSON 'They get spoken down to and looked at, like I used to get looked at by people as if to say oh you are not worth anything. It's quite hard because they judge you and they don't know actually what you have been through but they judge you on what they think you have been through.

Another young person emphasised the problem of stigma and discrimination:

It's like you have people walking past the night shelter and shouting like 'smackheads' and all that, but they're not bad people at all...you know, until you're in the situation yourself you can't really say anything...people have got erm like got addictions and things like that I think it's unfair myself. I think it's really cruel because people are shouting things at you in the street just makes them want to do it even more, when they are trying to get off it, like trying to get off drugs and drink and what have you and you've got them people shouting smack head and piss head and all that.

Similarly, the young people who were living in hostels gave accounts of negative treatment by members of the public. One young person described how he had responded when discriminatory comments were made towards him:

Well I've had one person say something so I said to him if you realised how hard we're all trying in there you might change your mind...Basically I was just walking down the driveway and as I've come round the corner he said you're going to be on the dole the rest of your life and basically just giving it all lip ...I just said well if you seen how hard, there's about twenty of us in here and they're all together in this building there's about twenty of us and we're all trying.

One of the respondents conveyed that she tried to be resilient in the face of such treatment: *'I don't really care to be honest, people go on and like if you're homeless they either accuse you of being on heroin or being on crack or whatever, so I just don't listen to them ...I don't care what they think about me, I am who I am...they're just, oh you tramp you're this you're that and I just say well if you don't like me then sod off.'* However, some respondents talked about members of the public being supportive and described acts of kindness, for instance::

We have a lot of donations as well, people bringing like food and a big box of books last night, sandwiches and things...the other day there was an old woman and every Christmas she brings 11 envelopes because there's 11 residents, £5 in an envelope for every resident, she does it every year.

Moreover, it was clear from two respondent accounts that there were efforts from the hostels and the residents to try to improve the reputation of the hostels by becoming involved in, for example, fundraising for charities: *'At the moment doing a lot of things with Children in Need, going to the papers with it, try and boost this place's reputation to help people get jobs.'*

Comment

There appears to be a lack of accessible information about the services available, with young people describing trying to locate services when they are in a crisis situation. This is supported by the recent Shelter Cymru petition³⁶ to the Welsh Assembly Government which called for education about leaving home to be made part of the national curriculum. It is evident that the young people face barriers in accessing frontline services, particularly in the statutory sector. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 amended the Children Act 1989 and imposed new duties on the local authority to provide better services to care leavers as part of corporate parenting responsibilities. In seeming conflict to the concept of corporate parenting, the young people describe feeling judged by the staff in the Homeless section of the housing department, which they find especially difficult as they are required to impart personal information about how they became homeless in order to secure emergency accommodation.

Clearly, it is important for staff to demonstrate sensitivity and respect when interviewing vulnerable young people. The definition of priority needs leads to difficulties. Young men over the age of 18 tend not to fall into the 'priority need' group which means that they are unlikely to be allocated housing authority or housing association priority. Young homeless people can experience stigma and discrimination from the general public, which has an impact on what is often already low self esteem. This can lead to young people trying to hide their situation, and feeling ostracised from society.

³⁶ Norman, K. (2009) *Teens backing call to put leaving home on the curriculum*, Western Mail, 3 December 2009 accessed online <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2009/12/03/teens-backing-call-to-put-leaving-home-on-the-curriculum-91466-25309111/29th March 2010>

7. Results: Facilitators to receiving help

This chapter will examine what is working and helping homeless young people and includes discussion of voluntary sector services, hostels and the support given by other people in similar situations. Virtually all the young people have spoken with appreciation for the care and compassion provided by the voluntary and independent agencies which include Hafan, Foyer, Barnardo's Compass, NACRO, Shelter, St John, Ty Nos night shelter, CAIS, The Elms & Soup Dragon. The young people describe valuing practical support as well as someone who is willing to listen and understand. It is apparent from the respondents' accounts that the voluntary independent service in Wrexham offers a wide range of services that suits and attracts homeless people with different needs. The services they provide in this area are valued and cater well for the basic needs of homeless people in Wrexham; it appears from the young people's accounts that similar services are not available in other areas.

Support in hostels

The young people valued the support that was given to them in the hostels, both in terms of meeting their basic needs of food, warmth and shelter, but also in relation to the support that was provided by the staff: *'Most of the staff in the Foyer they are all they are there because they want to be there and they want to try and have a positive influence on people's lives and help them get through whatever is going on in their lives ...'* This was also echoed by a number of young people:

The main thing that I have found helpful is that they are always there for you. ..they give you advice on things and they help you get into hostels at one point they were trying to get a bond for me to get me a private rented flat...My support worker makes it easier for me because if I have to go to the council she will come with me and she does the talking for me... say yesterday I just sat there and just screamed and let everything out for about an hour and she just sat there and listened ... She does not judge me she listens to what is going on in my head and helps me.

When they first come in for your interview and everything they tell you, they'll help you out, get all your housing forms, everything sorted, Clwyd Alun, Wales and West, and they're so fantastic ...every one of them should have a medal for what they're doing and that. ...I don't know where I'd be without this place, right now...basically the staff and the help you get from here is to help you move on to a flat ... And it helps you from like if you've got a bad back ground like me and other people and that, they help you with it.

It was apparent from the interviews that the young people understood the structure of the hostels, in that young people can develop and move on to the next hostel and the next stage; some respondents seemed to welcome the boundaries that this structure provides: *'they do a move on plan,...and basically if they think you're doing really well or if they know you're going to get a job or training they'll move you in to foyer, then basically it's a lot easier from there'* another explained: *'Every week you have a support meeting with one of the members of staff and you go through all your issues.'*

As well as support to young people living in the hostel, two respondents spoke about support that was offered by a particular hostel (St John's) to homeless young people who were not residents:

All the staff will let anyone in, they won't keep you at the door, they invite you straight in...The door's open, you can just walk in and have a chat any time And if they are on the streets they do the same here, like if there's no bed they give you a sleeping bag.

A theme that emerged from the interviews was that some young people valued the support that communal living in the hostels provided:

Basically I think like my friend, he needed a lot of help when he came here, because he was really down...he is really trying now, like we're together we just sort ourselves out... all of us have got different problems.' And another respondent stated: 'It's just like one big family in here, most people get on with each other...you get to know good people, stick to 'em like, make a good friend, help each other out.

However, this was not the case for all the young people interviewed; some accommodation requires young homeless people to share facilities which can be problematic: *'...I don't like sharing like the kitchen, there's 11 of us that live here and it's hard to like cook in the kitchen...there's two people in my bedroom so it's a bedroom for three which isn't ideal, but it's a bed isn't it.'*

Voluntary sector support

This section of the report focuses on voluntary sector provision in addition to hostels including the Compass project (Barnardos), NACRO, Shelter, the Elms and CAIS are also included in this discussion. As the data indicates, the respondents valued the services provided. An important aspect for all of the young people was feeling listened to and accepted by the workers and the service generally: *'They listen to you here all the time they give you help... in Compass.'* Another explained: *'... Barnardo's it's the only decent place, [NAME] is like family. I feel comfortable coming here if I went to anywhere else I would feel embarrassed and ashamed I couldn't speak to people I couldn't look at myself properly I just couldn't cope. I am accepted here for who I am and not as vermin basically.'*

As well as having people to talk to, practical support like advice and help with form filling and advice was valued by most of the young people: *'I found that Barnardo's were a big help...they can help you get a place, they can help with forms and things because I am not very good.... Barnardo's obviously I will mention again they are absolutely brilliant.'* Another young person said *'...Compass and Shelter have been the best and NACRO have been good as well. Just people being there and supporting people and all the opportunities because they have loads of stuff going on'.* Another respondent stated: *'Well there is Shelter for advice they don't actually have much powers in what they can do, they are very good in helping you with the legal side of things and knowing what your rights are and what you are entitled to...'*

Another important issue identified by all the young people was the assistance in meeting basic needs of food and hygiene: *'You can do washing and you can get meals at Compass ...I think it is run by CAIS they have what they used to call the soup dragon...it is like a butty van two or three nights a week..'* another respondent added: *'We were going to the Elms ..and then we'd miss a day without food and then go back so it wasn't too bad The night shelter told us, they've got like a like a leaflet where you can get free food if like you're hungry and the Elms isn't on or the soup dragon you can come here [St John's] and get some food..'* and one respondent explained: *'The Methodist church, they give you a bacon butty in the morning and the salvation army gives you a cooked breakfast.'* Particular services being better suited to the needs of young people was highlighted by a minority of respondents:

I went to NACRO, I always go there, I get on really well with [NAME], I think it's the best place in Wrexham to go to [NAME] does so much for you ...people go to Compass and Barnardos and that, and they are alright places to go but like I said, in my personal opinion, I don't like it there, I think it's too institutionalised, you go into this big waiting room.

However, this did not appear to be important for the young people generally.

Some of the services provided are valued and cater well for the basic needs of homeless people in Wrexham; it appears from some respondent accounts that similar services are not available in other areas: *'Since I've been in Wrexham I think the support has been a lot better than somewhere like say (NAME), there is nowhere I can get anything to eat, you've got to buy your own food ... when I've been in [NAME] before and I've been homeless I tried to get a doctor in several places and just they don't take on homeless people.'* A similar view was shared by other respondents: *'like I went to [city] one day and I've seen a few young people on the street and I think well what are they doing there? Because I know [city]'s a big place and surely they should have, well really what Wrexham have got, but more of them. ...I can't really see [NAME] helping anyone on the street.'*

Social Networks

The vast majority of young people had learnt about some of the services that are available from other young people in similar situations. As has been outlined earlier, most of the young people did not know where to go for help and were not familiar with the services available. A common theme emerging from the interviews was the level of support between young people in similar situations which was highlighted as important by the vast majority of young people. The level of support has arisen because people who are homeless are so isolated and stigmatised. Young people are isolated from mainstream society and lack family support – there is evidence that the young people create their own social networks which are vital to them. Young homeless people with complex need lack social capital and have limited access to acquire it. They will tend to utilize whatever contacts or networks possible to gain opportunities, services, help from each other or those they come into contact with.

It was apparent from the interviews in this report that peer support was particularly valued by young people when street homeless. This is illustrated by the following comments:

I bought a tent and was with a friend, who was actually in the night shelter and used to spend some time with me just to make sure I'm alright, bring some food and stuff and he started looking after me when I was in the tent, ...Some residents from here, St John's, knew that I was living in the tent and had a word with the staff because there was a room coming up free and I just kept talking to the staff about it and eventually I got in

Another young person further emphasised the help they received:

One person she looked after me as well. She was about nearly 20 ... so she kind of took care of me and showed me where to go and what to do ...I was walking around one night ...she came around and I was just sitting on a kerb and she started talking to me and I thought is she drunk or not and she was asking why wasn't I at home so I told her everything that had happened she was like I am homeless too and it went from there.

It was clear from the respondent accounts that these social support networks were valued as important to both young men and young women. Some respondents described how they would not leave each other to sleep on the streets if only one of them was able to secure a bed for the night *'because [NAME] is obviously my best friend so she won't leave me because me being on my own, so she's going to stay with me even though she can go to the shelter if it weren't for [NAME] I don't think I'd be here now and it's same for her, really because me and her we've been through a lot together but we've always stuck together which is a good thing We've got each other, we just look out for each other'* . This was echoed by another young person: *'I'm with my friend, she's homeless as well, it's been quite bad but at least now that, I've made a lot of good friends, because a lot of my friends are homeless anyway so they know what I've been through and I know what they've been through...I won't leave her on her own, she knows I won't...we're together twenty four seven...I was homeless and she was homeless at the same time, since then we've just been inseparable, always been together.'*

Although fear of the older, established homeless people has been described earlier, it was evident from some respondents accounts, that this older group had been helpful to the newer, homeless young people, like one young person who spoke about other people sleeping in the night shelter *'The residents were nice. They'd try and chat to me, ask me how I am and stuff. See if I'm alright.'* A similar view was echoed by another respondent: *'because me and [NAME] are young they take us under their wing and you know help us and tell us what you have to do and things like that ...when I have had trouble I just turn to the older ones and they protect me from it like, they'll go stay with us and what have you so we just stay with them now. We're just like a big family we are...we look out for each other all the time...They do, look after me and [NAME] a lot, yeah they do, because we are younger and more vulnerable because we are girls as well.'*

Comment

There is a range of valued support for homeless young people in Wrexham provided by the voluntary sector, with staff who are perceived by the young people to be committed, supportive and approachable. However, it should be recognised that the provision of some voluntary services, for example the after care services at Barnardos, are in part funded by the local authority, therefore the distinction between statutory and voluntary provision is not clear cut. Young people are appreciative of the services that are provided including practical support to meet basic needs of food, warmth and shelter, and emotional support. Young people also value friendships with other people in similar situations, and obtain support from the relationships they develop. The relationships are particularly important as the young people are often without family support. This factor emerged strongly from the research, and developing mechanisms to enhance these important social support systems is identified as a recommendation for improved policy and practice.

8. Results: Gaps in service provision

Given the inability to secure settled personal accommodation young homeless, the young people's accounts indicate that some young people tend to lead a transient existence staying on friends' couches, Ty Nos (night shelter), hostels and sometimes on the streets. It emerged from the accounts that there are 'hidden homeless' young people who may not be classed as homeless, but are for example, sleeping on friends sofas: *'I was on mate's sofas for about 6 months It's not easy being homeless and it's harder still relying on friends, because I don't have any family close by ... [NAME] turned round and said I wasn't a priority...you've got a roof over your head. I said but that could change at any point.* A similar point was articulated by another young person:

Mostly at 16 you would probably sleep on your friends sofa, somewhere you feel safe while I mean, March 2008 the Welsh Assembly Government went out and counted all the homeless people in Wales and they come back and said it was between 128 and 165 homeless people in Wales, are they going to go anywhere that is not off the beaten track, that they don't feel safe to look for people. I don't think so, when you consider that there are probably about 128 homeless people in Wrexham alone... if you are not actually registered as homeless nobody knows you are homeless, even if you are living in a hostel even though you are technically homeless they don't class you as homeless. So they have got ways of hiding things from people.

Unsuitable accommodation

To re-iterate, some temporary accommodation requires young homeless people to share rooms. This can make young people feel unsafe and places them in a vulnerable position. Some accommodation requires young homeless people sharing facilities (kitchen, bathroom etc) with unsuitable tenants:

They put me in [NAME]...I was outside talking to a friend and one of the residents in there has just got out of prison and put a knife to me so obviously me frightened I went inside and got a knife and I was stood by the draining board if he comes near me I'm going to stab him or I'm going to phone the police. And he put a knife to me again and the police came and took us both until they realised that it was his fault because he threatened me with a knife and he was about 24 and I was only 16 then.

A similar view is echoed by other young people:

It's like a horrible B&B where you can catch all like diseases and that from. They put you there when is there isn't any space in Hafan though; it's like a respite so you have got somewhere to go. The rooms are like half the size of this, your bedroom, it has got a single bed and one cupboard, you have got to share a bathroom and stuff as well. You are only allowed to use the kitchen for two hours a day. No there is a microwave at the top of the stairs and a kettle and that but that is about it. Yes, there is smack heads and that that go there. And they put people who have just come out of prison and that in there as well. No there was a murderer, when my mate lived there, there was a murderer living across the way from her.

It emerged from the interviews that young people with complex need would benefit from help to live independently when they obtain settled personal accommodation otherwise attempts to live independently not succeed. Despite the after care services and tenancy support available some young people felt support was not there when they left the hostel, and were afraid of running into difficulties:

When you leave the [NAME] ...you are supposed to have, they call it floating support where you have support from the [NAME] for 6 months afterwards like a transitionary to try and help you become independent, budgeting and learn how to cope living on your own, I never had any but ok I went with NACRO and I had two support sessions a week but I know other people who had no contact, even though they say they will stay in contact and they will go and see them and also sometimes people who go with the council they are supposed to have support workers from the council and the majority of people that I know how have been assigned workers have never actually met them, there are big gaps in that area.

Rough sleeping

As is evident from the respondent accounts, there are young people sleeping rough on the streets often in makeshift tents in parks or woodlands or sometimes in sheltered areas near railways, shops and public buildings:

Anywhere, anywhere that's warm, outside the swimming baths, where they've got the big fan... in the train station disabled toilets because they've got a heater and what have you, slept loads of places...I've been sleeping ..in a tent like, but I went to St John's to get a sleeping bag so it hasn't been that bad... we made it ourselves from stuff out of the skips and that ...it keeps the rain out and what have you, it's nice and warm ...it's a bit scary but you know it was alright ...well it is cold but I wear lots of jackets and that. I stayed there last night, a bit of rain got in but it weren't that bad.

Out of the twenty young people interviewed, over three quarters had experienced rough sleeping (n=16). Some respondents talked about being fearful of going to sleep: *'I didn't really go to sleep you know well you just lie down ...that was because I ran away from home because my mum was beating me up and I couldn't cope with it'* another said *'Most nights I used to go into Bellevue park and some nights I used to find a random bench and one of two nights I just didn't sleep I used to just walk around Wrexham all night because I was too scared to go to sleep sometimes'*. Other respondents talked about having to move to different places: *'I had to move every now and again so it didn't get too obvious where I was all the time. It felt crap really.'*

It was apparent from some of the accounts that young people sleeping rough or sheltering in Wrexham would be moved on: *'We used to shelter under the army place and people that actually were working there have actually moved us on, so we weren't allowed to be there ...we can't really go anywhere, so we just try and stay out of the rain ...we've been moved on by the police when we've actually been sheltering and also when we've been sleeping rough as well.'*

It was apparent from some respondent accounts that spending the night in police cells or in custody was preferable to a night on the streets: *'I ended up getting*

arrested...which usually happens and that's why I'm in and out of jail...it didn't bother me if I got arrested...Because at least in jail you've got a routine, you've always got a bed, you've always got food, ... it's just easy to get used to.. it's better than being out on the streets ...last time I got out of jail was like three weeks ago, I didn't want to leave ...I just loved having the routine and having people there who cared about me and who tried to help me. '

One respondent explained that there was nowhere to keep personal belongings, like clothing while street homeless:

Just what I'm wearing really and I've got a few other clothes stashed in the bush by the library but in the shelter we were keeping our clothes there and they did say to you, you are not allowed to keep your clothes there and if they find them they give you 3 days to take them and then otherwise they chuck them out ...I know it's their job but they did tell me, warned me that I'm not allowed to keep them there but they put them in the bin like, so I've got less than what I have now.

As outlined above, the respondents describe feeling scared and when street homeless. Some respondents gave accounts of becoming victims of crime while homeless in Wrexham: *'some youths ...took money off me I actually had some alcohol at the time as well, they took that off me and started kicking me and punching me when I was on the floor so I actually tried to fight them off by standing up and because they were youths I couldn't hit any of them because they were under age so I would have got in trouble for it'*. Other respondents also spoke of the risk of theft and violence sleeping rough:

I had heard all sorts of stories of people having been urinated upon or beaten up and stuff when they were sleeping rough, it has happened to a few of my friends before now. I have had most of my things pinched, I've been robbed when I've been sleeping and things like that, I've been followed by horrible people.., because you know we're young girls.

Emergency accommodation

It was apparent from some interviews that demand for beds at the night shelter was an issue: *'...it used to open at 8 so we'd be there for like half past 5 and we'd just stand around...You can't get seen by the staff waiting or they won't give you a bed...That's one of the rules.... We just hid in the bushes...They would let us into like a cage at 8 o'clock and then they'd start taking us in one by one processing all the forms'*. A similar point was made by another respondent:

There's not many girls that go there, it's mostly boys but if there's more boys than girls then they take beds out of the girls room and put them into the boys room, so if you're not there on time, you know you have to be there 7 o'clock and if you're not there then you don't get a room, get a ... It's lovely, I think it's good. I think it's a really good thing for people.

It was clear from the accounts of the young people that securing warmth and shelter and occupying their day was difficult, particularly when staying at the night shelter: *'You're out at 8 in the morning and if it's winter... most people I've talked to that have*

been in the night shelter find the daytime the hardest because it's such a long time. It drags, that's why most people start drinking, to get them through the day And people that haven't, that never used to drink that have actually gone to the night shelter and have actually started drinking' . This issue was highlighted by another respondent:

So that's why people are like shoplifting and things like that to find money and keep themselves occupied and what have you because when we leave the night shelter at 8 o'clock we all go and sit in the bus station just a big group of us sitting there and we get kicked out after because they say we're causing trouble but we're just sitting there because we've got nowhere else to go basically.

Permanent accommodation

All the young people interviewed aimed to secure their own self-contained flat. Although the majority of the young people spoke positively about the temporary accommodation that is available in Wrexham, the respondents highlighted difficulties in accessing suitable accommodation to move on to. From the accounts, it is evident that settled permanent accommodation is hard to secure, and sometimes when it is available it can be unsuitable. When they have gained accommodation young people seem unaware of what support is available to them. Without adequate appropriate and accessible support young people could end up returning to hostel-type accommodation. Young people raised this issue:

I think there is quite a bit of help but the help that is available is only to find short-term housing such as like you come to Barnardo's or the council and they are just going to put you in somewhere like Hafan or the Foyer and ...I don't think looking for long-term places there is not much help for that in Wrexham.

A similar view was expressed by other young people: *'other than the hostels and even then it's just like a transitional thing where you are waiting to be housed. So a lot of people don't get housed from the Foyer a lot of people end up getting evicted or their time runs out ...even though they still haven't got anywhere to live.'*

All of the young people are on the waiting list for council and/or housing association accommodation. However, from the accounts given, it appears that the points system is so tough some young people may never qualify for a council or housing association property. The majority of respondents raised this as an important issue:

One lad in here he's been here for three years now and the council still haven't offered him a house and he's got a job, he's in college and he's really trying hard but they won't give him anything and he's like twenty-five now I think or twenty-three something like that, and he has really tried.

The respondents were able to identify that there is a shortage of council property in Wrexham, like ONE YOUNG PERSON, *'...I was on the list for a year and a half and there was no flats available...the only ones that were available were given to people that have got families and people that have got kids and that so there was no way I was going to get a flat'*. This was echoed by one respondent who said: *'I think a lot of it is the lack of actual housing in the Wrexham area. Or the lack of suitable housing as the council are*

still doing repairs in a lot of places, people don't want to live in certain areas as well, because there are some quite rum areas in Wrexham.'

All the respondents were registered with social housing providers other than the local authority, like Wales and West and Clwyd Alun, although respondents described similar waiting lists for the Housing Associations: *'It's actually getting the flat because every waiting list has a backlog at the moment.'* One young person had been allocated a Wales and West property and spoke positively about her experience:

They are really helpful and to be honest they have got a lot more houses....they are good and look after me and everything so they have started buying a lot of houses from the Council now so that I am what I am in an ex council house which is owned by Wales and West.

As a consequence of difficulty in securing a council or housing association tenancy, young people have to rent property from private a landlord, which does not offer the protection of social housing providers. Respondents highlighted this issue: *'The main problem here is that there is no suitable housing...all the new houses that are being built are private, unaffordable, unrealistic rents...so you know money grabbing land lords and estate agents They are out there trying to make a quick buck and we are the ones who suffer for it in the end because we can't get anywhere to live.'* Two respondents' recounted problems they had experienced with a private landlord:

I don't want private because we were private before. There's a lot of hassle. When we fell out my partner went to take the keys back but they said he can't give them back unless he gives them notice in writing and the rent was paid until [date] and erm we tried to move back in because he didn't give them nothing in writing. And they found out, they changed the locks and we haven't got back in since. Been to a solicitor, can't do nothing. They said to put it in small claims but it would just cost us money.

One young person noted difficulties in securing private accommodation too:

Most letting agencies won't do anything unless you are over 21 now ...so some people haven't got a chance in hell to get private and the council, if you have been in hostels before or have been in places like [NAME] which is a B&B ...they don't touch you with a barge pole, if you have been there.

Comment

The number of homeless young people in Wrexham is difficult to establish³⁷ as there are 'hidden homeless'. For example, young people who do not have permanent accommodation, but are 'sofa surfing' do not appear in official statistics. The recent provision of Ty Nos night shelter in Wrexham is valued by the young people who have stayed there, although some young people are put off going to the night shelter as they feel intimidated by the older, established homeless people who use the facility. For vulnerable homeless young people, dormitory style accommodation while better than sleeping on the streets may feel a threatening situation.

It appears that there are at times not enough places to meet the demand given the number of homeless people in Wrexham, which includes young people. There are young people in Wrexham who are rough sleeping, sleeping in parks, outside public buildings and in makeshift shelters. Young people have been victims of crime and verbal abuse while street homeless with over half the respondents (n=12) having been a victim of crime. Although the young people spoke positively about the support given by the voluntary sector and within the hostels, finding permanent accommodation proved to be very difficult; waiting lists for local authority and housing association property are long, with young people resorting to using the private sector which does not have the same protection as social housing provision. Furthermore, there is a need for more accessible and practical support when young people do secure their own tenancy.

³⁷ Hart, E., (2006) Youth Homeless Scoping Paper, Welsh Assembly Government, <http://www.cynulliadcymru.org/c47f2ac6b4726e395a40b310f172f081.pdf> accessed 25th March 2010

9. Results: Young people's suggested improvements

A variety of improvements were suggested by the respondents. Most of the young people highlighted that they would like somewhere to go during the day to occupy their time, gain support from each other and from staff, and for food, drink and shelter:

I think there should be a day centre or something or to get people off the streets, stop drinking and just do something for the day...Somewhere we can get some food or like, erm, where someone can just relax and talk to people and socialise really' another young person said '..I think just somewhere for people to go whether they are living somewhere or street homeless, for them to go, not 24 hours like but somewhere that's open every day ...somewhere that's like...You get advice, not like formal advice, but somewhere for a chat and meeting people.

Some young people suggested more structural changes:

I the priority list I think it needs to change, because it's not only women that are a priority need I think younger people are vulnerable more ... just because they're re male they're not vulnerable apparently, in their eyes which I can't see is true ... And you're not supposed to be sexist but obviously they are. If I was a woman, I'd have somewhere.

Two young people suggested more night shelter type provision, '*... I think the council should be a lot more helpful, there should be more night shelters than just the one, because if you get to that night shelter and it's full you've got nowhere to go then, it's like having a race down there*' another explained: '*I think there should be more things like the night shelter out there for people... because it is a really good thing. You know people look forward to it, say oh I'm going to the night shelter, I'm going to get a shower and things like that.*'

One young person suggested making information about homelessness and services more widely available to young people:

I think it should be put out in the papers ... For young people...And just say that there are more options out there for them. ..Maybe on like social networks, they could put some more information on them because I know a lot of young people go on to like Facebook or Bebo ... The page that you go to straight away or something.

Another young person suggested a change in the way services were delivered:

I'd definitely be there not to tell them what to do but to say you can either do this or you can go there and do that ... you give them options and let them choose, instead of telling them what to do Because a lot of the issues again, is you know getting their independence back, building up the confidence again after being on the street... it then makes them feel they've done it and not us, or the person who's given the help so therefore it will build up their confidence Give them the options and let them do it and if it does not work out for them say well, maybe it wasn't the best option, try that one instead and let them do it, you know, get used to failing, or getting back up there and cracking on straight away with it.

Some young people felt that ex-homeless people should be employed to provide support and guidance to homeless young people: *'Young people are going through the same thing as people are going through So you need to talk to someone who has been through it. Some people read from a book and think that they understand it and they don't.'* One-to-one support from people who have been through similar experiences was viewed as valuable by most of the young people:

People from hostels have a one-to-one with the different people... because how I see it is probably a person off the street could see another person who was on the street...I think it would be much better and people would understand and realise. See like what services are out there and that will help them more what hostels are like and what rules are like and what we are doing here. I sometimes, when I was young I felt a bit intimidated talking to older people, they might judge you more and you don't want to say much to them Because they've never been homeless, not one staff I don't think, might have been one or two but you don't see them often, and you don't see what homeless is like, they've never experienced it in their life.

Two young people were involved with and recommended peer education:

I have been doing some work with Shelter recently with peer education or peer learning ...talking to kids about homelessness and I think that is the best way getting them before the problems occur speaking to them when they are 13 or 14 like we were yesterday and explaining, I try and get some of the stigma surrounding it as well because obviously they assume that all homeless people are heroin addicts or you know alcoholics ...statistically one in five 16 to 25 year olds in Wales will become homeless, over 20% of 16 to 25 year olds will experience homelessness at some point, so basically to let them know, there is one part that we do in the presentation is to get them to shake hands with the person next to them and then say that there is a one in 5 chance that you have just shook hands with someone who is going to be homeless and then obviously they all start laughing and pointing at their friends and we say yes but you don't realise that that person could be you and they are like shit yes it could be me obviously not trying to scare them, well a little bit but obviously they need, it is scary but you are just trying to make people aware that it can happen to anyone and to let them know that if it does happen you are not alone there is help out there and to let them know where to find it' This young person continued that outreach work would be beneficial 'obviously not everybody goes to youth clubs these days ... not every teenager goes to school.

And one young person recounted:

I'm doing talks at high schools at the moment with Shelter Cymru on the homeless ...I asked them how many of them would have turned round and said when I walked in the door and said you're not homeless- and they all put their hands up, and I said I am actually homeless. ..I said don't ever put yourself in that situation on purpose, because I know people that have gone out to start arguments with their family to go and live on their own as an excuse to go and get a flat or a house – it never ends up like that and it's scary because there's a lot of people out there that you can't trust and that, do just care about themselves and not others, and it's not a nice situation to be in.

A common theme emerging from the respondent accounts was that peer support was important. Some young people suggested the provision of structured peer support within the community of homeless young people:

People like me among them that work with people ...Because they know what you are going through....Like a youth club, perhaps something like that . Similar views were echoed by another respondent: ' to get more people in the same group together like, ...maybe if you got more of the homeless together ...they could do something about it if that's makes sense. ...its just nice to have the advice if someone is going through the same thing as you as well.' One young person further amplified: 'maybe something to do with young people to actually get them involved in you know something or other because I wouldn't want anyone to go through the things that I have been through' and one added: 'people need to know who they can, people can listen to them, people need advice now and again. They just need help...but you know if people really need our help then they can come....because we have been through it all, we have been in care, we have been through it all over the years, you know I know what they have been put through, I know half of their stories we are just all friends, well we try to be anyway.

Comment

The young people suggested a range of improvements and were appreciative of being asked for their ideas. The suggestions included more night shelter type provision, and more structural aspects like changing the definition of priority need so it was not so restrictive, particularly in relation to young men over eighteen.

Many of the young people identified having somewhere to spend time during the day as important; the needs identified included having a place for warmth and shelter and being able to obtain advice, although mainly to gain support from other young people who are in a similar situation. It is pertinent to note that by 31st March 2010, the Personal Advisors service will be delivered 'in house' by Social Services, rather than being provided by Barnardos. Although it is understood that the provision of further facilities is being explored, the informality and accessibility of the existing established daily drop in service will come to an end.

The young people valued spending time with others who had been homeless, believing that a greater level of understanding was

achieved. Some young people suggested that staff employed to work with homeless young people should have experienced homelessness themselves, perhaps as a consequence of not feeling understood by some front line staff. The young people expressed a desire to offer support and advice to other young people and were keen for mechanisms to be put in place to allow them to do this.

10. Discussion

The strength of this small scale qualitative research, involving twenty young people from Wrexham who have experience of homelessness, is that it draws heavily upon the voices of the young people. The systematic coding, grouping and analysis of the shared experiences disclosed by the young people enables the reader to gain a better insight into the lived-experience of homelessness. The reader can begin to appreciate the issues and barriers young people face on a day to day basis. Too often homelessness can be represented by facts and generalisations within which the true extent and nature of homelessness and the young person's lived experience can be overlooked.

Definitions and calculations regarding the extent of homelessness are contested. According the figures from the Welsh Assembly Government in the first 3 months of 2006 only four young people (aged 16-21 years old) were considered as priority need in the Borough of Wrexham³⁸, our research suggests the true extent is likely to be higher. There is often a discrepancy not only regarding the extent of homelessness but also in respect of the reality and the experiences of homeless people - as highlighted in recent research by Joseph Rowntree's Trust (2008):

Within all four countries, there was a widespread consensus amongst agency representatives that policy on homelessness generally, and youth homelessness specifically, was moving in the right direction. Young people, however, did not concur with this view because of the challenges they faced with finding housing.³⁹

The young people in this study are not a representative sample, but they are all young people with complex need who have had personal experience of having nowhere to sleep. Their shared narrative, coded and analysed by the research process, provides important knowledge and understanding to help politicians, policy makers, managers, and workers appreciate the detail and minutiae of day to day life of what it is like to be young, vulnerable and have nowhere to sleep. The young people have 'told it as it is' and the researchers have been committed to faithfully capture, code and communicate their voices and ensure they are strongly represented within this report. What this small scale research project did not attempt to do, was include the views of the various agencies, managers, carers or support staff. This would however, have enhanced the research but was not possible given time and budgetary restraints. This research set out to obtain a rich research data by enabling young homeless people with complex need - a group who can be hard to reach and difficult engage - to 'Tell it as it is'. Although this research presents a one-sided perspective, the voices of young homeless people are so often excluded from research. It is interesting too to note that the issues raised by the young people in this research resonate with many other research studies on homeless

³⁸ Hart, E., (2006) Youth Homeless Scoping Paper, Welsh Assembly Government, <http://www.cynulliadcymru.org/c47f2ac6b4726e395a40b310f172f081.pdf> accessed 25th March 2010

³⁹ Quilgars D., Johnsen, S & Pleace, N. (2008 p.xv) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Decade of Progress? York, JRF

people⁴⁰, indeed we would argue they go further – they provide a depth and detail of understanding previously hidden by ‘broad brush strokes’.

While the issues raised by the young people are particularly pertinent to Wrexham, it is likely that similar issues would be found in other areas; further research with young homeless people in other towns and cities would add some clarity and comparison to test out this assumption. However, other areas should benefit from listening to the detailed narratives from the young people in this research study, learning in detail about: some of the precipitating factors that lead to homelessness; the barriers that make it difficult for them to find permanent, stable and suitable accommodation; facilitators that equip and enable them to access services and gain the help they need; and gaps in services.

The research highlights a gap in services for vulnerable children who move from children’s services to adult services. An integrated approach to meeting the needs of young people is central to the Welsh Assembly Government strategy for social services⁴¹ which also promotes the importance of locally based co-ordinated services to enable young people to make a smooth transition to adulthood. However, clearly the narratives from this group of young people suggest that there are considerable gaps in services.

One significant theme emerges from this research and appears to undermine so much of the young people’s experience while seeking independent living, is a shared experience of feeling marginalised and excluded. At times some young people feel subject to stigma and discrimination. For a group of people lacking support

The views of service providers (while very important), are beyond the scope of the small scale study which is focused upon developing knowledge and understanding about this marginalised group of service users. The findings of this small scale research could inform a more comprehensive and inclusive study in the future. While the study has a specific regional focus in the North East of Wales, the findings can inform key national policy development needs and indeed internationally.

Policy & Practice Implications

1. The requirement for young people to demonstrate they are not ‘intentionally homeless’ places them in a difficult position in that:
 - a. The issues that have precipitated homelessness for a young person are often painful, personal and difficult to discuss to with a worker who they are unfamiliar with, who they do not perceive to be approachable or understanding of their situation.

⁴⁰ Quilgars D., Johnsen, S & Pleace, N. (2008) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Decade of Progress? York, JRF

⁴¹ Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities: A strategy for social services in Wales over the next decade (2007) Welsh Assembly Government.

- b. The young people often have limited experience and/or skills at independently engaging with bureaucracy and sometimes find these interviews difficult to negotiate.
 - c. The rule of 'intentionally homeless' appears to be rigidly and sometime unfairly applied – for example to a young person who has to leave accommodation because of threats and bullying from other residents.
- 2. The definitions for 'priority need' and the requirement to provide accommodation as asserted by the Welsh Assembly Government do not always appear to be delivered at a local level. This situation is not unique to Wrexham as young homeless people in UK-wide research⁴² also identify a gap between what is claimed to be happening by the agencies and what they personally experience.
- 3. While young people conveyed that they are appreciative of support, some services do not meet the need of young people:
 - a. Some temporary accommodation requires young homeless people to share rooms. Sharing bedroom space with other people some of whom may have mental health needs, alcohol and drug problems can be threatening and intimidating for some young people.
 - b. Young women are more likely to be deemed 'priority need' than young men. We expected to come across predominantly young homeless men and we were surprised at the number of homeless young women in Wrexham. The needs of homeless women are different to men (particularly young homeless women with child care responsibilities) and services need to cater for them.
 - c. Some accommodation requires young homeless girls/women to share facilities such as the kitchen, bathroom and living area with unsuitable tenants for example one young woman with a baby described sharing a house with long term older male drug users recently released from prison.
- 4. There is a major gap in service provision between shared temporary housing and settled personal accommodation. Suitable personal accommodation is very hard to secure. Young people with complex need who are successful in gaining accommodation often lack the resources and support to successfully live independently.
- 5. Virtually all the young people were from Wrexham and the surrounding area. There was no evidence of young people gravitating towards Wrexham, even though the area provides a good range of voluntary support services such as the night shelter, soup kitchen, drop in services and hostels. Providing a good range of helpful and supportive services does not appear to attract young homeless people from other areas.

⁴² Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S. & Pleace, N., (2008) Youth homelessness in the UK, JRF, York

6. The young people interviewed spoke with appreciation for the care and compassion provided by the voluntary agencies in Wrexham appreciating the practical support as well as having someone who is willing to listen and understand. The voluntary independent service in Wrexham offer a wide range of services that suits and meets the different needs of a range of homeless people. Despite the good range of voluntary support services in Wrexham the young people in this study found it extremely difficult to obtain secure accommodation and frequently found themselves trapped in a 'revolving door' (see fig. 1) which is a common finding in similar homelessness studies. There is a need for further research to explore policies and practices that will enable homeless young people to make more rapid progress to mainstream accommodation.

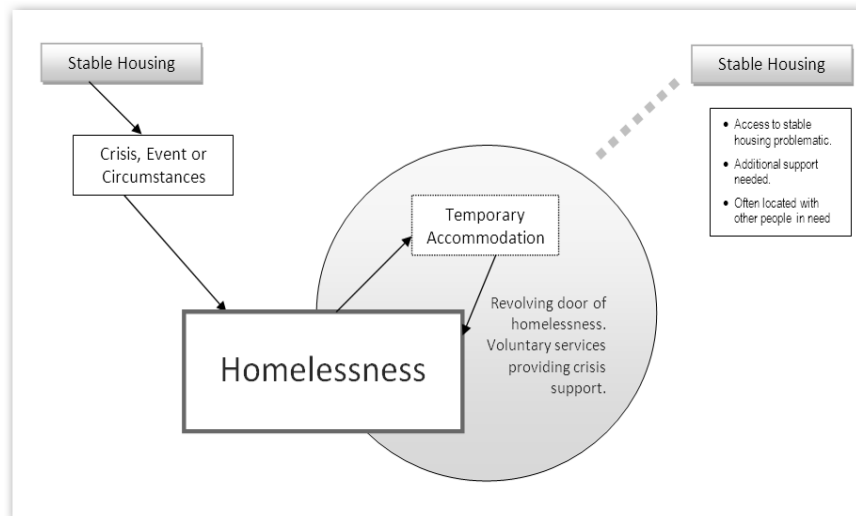


Figure 1. The Revolving Door of Homelessness

7. A lot of the young people have described occasions when they have become frustrated with their inability to extricate themselves from the revolving door of homelessness. As a result of frustration at not getting help they thought they warranted a number of the young people admitted to outbursts of anger. Vulnerable young people with complex need require help learning to deal with conflict and stress. Staff engaged in front line services need to develop greater understanding and sensitivity towards this vulnerable group. Employing ex-homeless young people in supportive front line roles may help improve the situation.
8. A significant number of young people felt that buddying and one to one support from people who have been through similar experiences would make a difference. Ex-homeless people could be employed across various agencies to provide a wide range of support and guidance services to help homeless youth.
9. The majority of young people in this small sample spoke negatively about the Housing Office. They complained about what they perceived as unhelpful, dismissive and judgemental attitudes. Rightly or wrongly the young people felt disregarded and disbelieved. In contrast young people were appreciative and generally spoke positively regarding the help they received from the voluntary sector. An enhanced

Inter-Agency Youth Homelessness Forum with Service User representation could be used to improve communication and understanding between statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and young homeless people.

10. Virtually all the young people we interviewed hoped one day to be able to secure their own self-contained flat. However, the legislative criteria and interpretation of 'priority need' at a local level has meant that help for young people beyond the age of eighteen find it more difficult. Some of the young men over eighteen we interviewed felt it was extremely difficult (almost impossible) for them to be deemed a priority. Some of the young women we interviewed who had children had managed to secure accommodation but this was sometimes not particularly suitable. The current interpretation and impact of the housing and after-care legislation needs reviewing at a local level (maybe through an Interagency Homelessness Forum) to ensure that vulnerable young people in the area are not disregarded and at risk of developing a lifestyle centred upon homelessness.
11. The young people we interviewed believed that being homeless attracted stigma from the public amongst. Some of the young people strived hard to avoid being identified and labelled as homeless, they made distinctions between different groups of homeless people; a) the long term older homeless, b) the chaotic substance misusing homeless, and c) the young 'temporary' homeless – who prefer to be seen as young people without suitable accommodation. There may be an argument for services to cater specifically for one rather than all three groups. The issue of stigma only serves to add to the already onerous set of problems. Stigma is an issue that could be tackled in local communities by public awareness events and campaigns (possibly led by the Inter Agency Homelessness Forum).
12. Young people are isolated from mainstream society, they lack family support, lack social capital and have limited access to acquire it. The need for support becomes even greater because of the isolation and stigmatisation from mainstream society towards people who are homeless. There is evidence that some young homeless people in Wrexham create their own social networks which become vital for emotional support and meeting day to day basic needs. A lot of young people did not know where to go for help but learnt about services from other homeless people. Mixing across the different groups of homeless people was less common, however, given the scarce personal resources the homeless young people in this research tended to utilise whatever contacts or networks possible to help meet basic needs. A dedicated multi-agency seven day a week one stop shop day centre drop-in with practical support services to meet basic needs such as warmth, shelter, showers, laundrette and basic refreshments combined with welfare rights, social skills training and counselling may help vulnerable young people to become better informed and supported to exit the revolving door of homelessness.
13. Due to a lack of accommodation for young people in Wrexham there are young people sleeping rough on the streets often in makeshift tents in parks or woodlands or sometimes in sheltered areas near railways or factories. There is a need for a more accurate assessment of the number of young homeless people.
14. At the time of interviewing all the young people (apart from one who worked in a bar), were unemployed, a small minority were undertaking education programmes.

The majority of young people were not in education, employment or training (NEET), while these young people need accommodation the broader social, emotional and educational needs of young homeless people also need to be addressed.

11. Conclusions & Recommendations

The young people in this research had experience of homeless and a range of complex need including: mental health problems; self harm; family breakdown and conflict; sexual and physical abuse; close family bereavement and loss; alcohol and drug problems; learning difficulties; isolation as well as having been looked after by the local authority. While permanent accommodation is the pressing need, these young people will need additional support even when eventually accommodated in stable and good housing. Without this support these young people are at risk of losing stable accommodation and becoming homeless again.

Their vulnerability and basic needs mean that most young people are pre-occupied with securing food, shelter, warmth, hygiene, support and friendship. Given the inability to secure settled permanent accommodation young homeless people tend to lead a transient existence staying at various shelters, hostels, friends' couches, night shelters and sometimes sleeping rough. Young homeless people find the day time difficult as there are relatively few places for them to go.

Once homeless it was easy for young people to become trapped within the revolving door of temporary accommodation. All the young people in this research found it difficult to secure permanent accommodation. In these circumstances and given the difficult background and limited resources some young people we interviewed had become increasingly isolated, excluded and entrenched in their lifestyle.

Some of the vulnerable young people we interviewed may not reach their potential as adults unless policy and practice changes occur to provide the full range of services they need. There is clearly a need to invest resources in this most vulnerable group in order to try and prevent long term patterns of harmful behaviour. However, in a period of recession with the expectation of major cut-backs in public expenditure, given the competing demand from other groups, young homeless people with complex need may struggle to attract adequate funding for the services they need.

Key recommendations:

1. Information about leaving home and homelessness should be more available to young people generally. The evidence from this report supports the Shelter Cymru petition⁴³ to WAG calling on education about leaving home to be made part of the national curriculum. The young people who took part in the research described having difficulty identifying the services that were available on becoming homeless, and were often in crisis when they were looking for help. Education about the nature, risk and impact of homelessness combined with where and how to get help, will not only help improve knowledge across young people's social networks but it

⁴³ Norman, K. (2009) *Teens backing call to put leaving home on the curriculum*, Western Mail, 3 December 2009 accessed online <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2009/12/03/teens-backing-call-to-put-leaving-home-on-the-curriculum-91466-25309111/> 29th March 2010

may also help to reduce the level of discrimination towards young people who are homeless.

2. Given the nature and extent of youth homelessness observed in this research it suggest:
 - a. There is a need for a more accurate assessment of the actual number of young homeless people. Official figures seem to seriously under estimate the size of the problem.
 - b. The criteria for determining who can and can't be considered 'priority need' needs reviewing so that vulnerable young homeless people are not excluded.
 - c. The current interpretation and impact of the housing and after-care legislation also needs reviewing.
3. The gap between policies that are in place and how the young people experience services needs closing. Greater service user involvement and dialogue may help this process.
4. The Housing Act 1996 s191(1) states: 'A person becomes homeless intentionally if he deliberately does or fails to do anything in consequence of which he ceases to occupy accommodation which is available for his occupation and which it would have been reasonable for him to continue to occupy.' Becoming homeless at a young age is traumatic and often the result of a difficult set of circumstances. The experiences of young people in this research suggest the criteria and process for determining whether or not a young person can be regarded as 'intentionally homeless' need to be managed in a more sensitive and sympathetic manner.
5. Staff engaged in front line services, particularly those in the statutory sector, need to develop greater understanding and sensitivity towards this vulnerable group. Employing people who have experience of being homeless in supportive front line roles may help improve the situation.
6. A more effective Inter-Agency Youth Homelessness Forum, with good representation from young homeless people (who should be paid for their attendance and contribution) could help identify, inform, monitor, advise and review on a wide range of housing issues, including those listed above. An Inter-Agency Youth Homelessness Forum could also help improve communication and understanding between statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and young homeless people.
7. While young people value the help they do receive there is a need for some services to be more suited to the diverse range of needs of homeless young people, in particular, ensuring that as far as possible that young people are not required to share bedrooms, and that those responsible for children are provided with suitable accommodation in terms of location, facilities and sharing with other tenants.

8. To improve access and engagement with services people who have experience of being homeless could be employed across various agencies to provide a wide range of support and guidance services to help homeless youth.
9. In order to make contact with an often hidden population of young people who are homeless an outreach buddying or befriending services could be considered. People who have experience of being homeless could be employed as buddies providing information, advice and support.
10. Stigma is an issue that could be tackled in local communities by public awareness events and campaigns, possibly led by the Inter-Agency Youth Homelessness Forum. Some good work has already commenced in this area.
11. To enhance and develop the social support systems that the young people in this research have highlighted as so valued, a dedicated inter-agency seven day a week one-stop-shop day centre drop-in with practical support services to meet basic needs such as warmth, shelter, showers, laundrette and basic refreshments combined with welfare rights, social skills training and counselling would help vulnerable young people to become better equipped and supported to exit the revolving door of homelessness.
12. There is a need for further research to explore policies and practices that will enable homeless young people to progress from homelessness to permanent accommodation. Unless the present situation improves there is a real risk that some young homeless people will become trapped and entrenched within a transient and damaging lifestyle. This will be costly to them as well as to wider society.

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Appendix 1: Semi-Structured Questionnaire

'Tell it as it is' - Semi-structured interview schedule

- Explain research and our role
- Read through and discuss information leaflet and consent form
- Proceed only after signed consent agreed

Section One

1. Can you tell us what your housing situation is at the moment?
- where, who with, how long, how did you get this place, can you stay, do you want to stay etc
2. What's it like for young people in Wrexham trying to get housing?
- Is it harder for some young people than others to get help?
3. How do you think young people who need housing are seen and treated by the public?
4. What help do you think is available to support young people in Wrexham who need housing?
- What do you think of the help that's available? Any you see as particularly valuable?
5. Can you tell us what led to you having difficulties with housing?
6. How did you cope when you realised you had nowhere to live?
7. What help have you received?
- What did you think of that help?
8. What, if anything, puts you off getting help/accessing services in Wrexham?
9. What, if anything, makes it easier for you to get help/access services in Wrexham?
10. Is there any help (services or facilities) that you think should be available in Wrexham that at the moment isn't there or is hard to find?
11. Apart from needing somewhere decent to live what other things do you think **the young people you've met** have needed help with?
- Apart from housing what things have **you** have needed help with?

Section Two

Optional one word questions at the end of the interview (you don't have to answer if you don't want to) but the answers will help understand overall the background of young people who have had difficulties with housing in Wrexham.

Male or Female:	What age did you first become homeless:	
Do you speak Welsh:	Ever had to sleep in a hostel:	
Age:	Ever had to sleep on the streets/rough:	
Do you have children:	Ever been banned/barred from accommodation:	
Race/Nationality:	Ever had a drink problem:	
Age left school:	Ever had a drug problem:	
Do you have any formal qualifications:	Ever had problems with your emotional/mental health:	
Do you have any type of disability:	Ever been a victim of crime:	
Ever been excluded from school:	Do you have a criminal record:	
Ever been bullied in school:	Ever been in Prison/YOI or Secure Unit:	
Ever been in care or looked after:		

Appendix 2: Information for Participants

Information Sheet June 2009

'Telling it as it is'

A six month study being carried out by Barnardo's & Glyndwr University in Wrexham.

What's the study?

The Welsh Assembly want a better understanding of what it's like for young people who don't have a proper place to live in the Wrexham area.

They want to understand what sort of things make it harder for young people to find somewhere to live, and what sort of things help young people to find proper accommodation. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – this study is interested in **your** thoughts, **your** opinions, **your** experiences and want you to **'Tell it as it is'**.

The idea is that if we listen properly to young people and understand their experiences - then agencies and organisations should be in a better position to provide help. So this study wants to hear the experiences of young people who struggle to find a place to live. It is not often that young people themselves are asked for their views on this subject.

Who's involved?

- Julian Buchanan and Caroline Hughes from Glyndwr University.
- Menna Thomas and Caz Armstrong from Barnardo's/Compass

Can I get involved?

Yes if you are between 16-25years old and have had experience of not being able to find anywhere to live in Wrexham.

What'll be involved?

- We'll have a chat and ask a few questions and we just want you to tell it as it is.
- So we don't forget or misunderstand what you've said we'd like to record our discussion.
- If you've had enough, don't want to talk anymore or don't want to answer any particular questions - no problem.
- Everything you say will be kept confidential unless you tell us about an illegal activity which we'd have to report.
- It'll probably take around 45mins of your time maybe longer – and while we chat you can help yourself to the drinks and food available.
- At the end of our chat we'll give you a £10 Asda voucher as a 'thank you' for your time and effort.

Research Contact Details

If you want any further info about the study, please get in touch with Caz Armstrong at Barnardo's/Compass on Mob. 0780 587 5864 or you can contact Julian Buchanan or Caroline Hughes by email j.buchanan@glyndwr.ac.uk or c.hughes@glyndwr.ac.uk or by telephone on 01978 293448

Appendix 3: Participant Consent Form

Interview Consent Form

Please indicate that you have understood the verbal and written information by signing after the statements below. A copy of this consent form will kept by you and the researcher.

1. I understand what the research is for and why I'm being interviewed.
2. I understand that the interviews with the researcher will be digitally recorded only with my permission.
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time, without giving any reason.
4. I understand that any personal statements I make during this interview will be kept in the strictest confidence and all quotes and references will be anonymous in the report.

I have read the information above and agree to take part in the study

Respondent name.....

Respondent signature..... Date.....

Researcher Name:

Researcher Signature..... Date.....

Appendix 4: Information for Advisory Group

Information Sheet for advisory group May 2009

'Telling it as it is'

A six month study being carried out by Barnardo's & Glyndwr University in Wrexham.

What's the study?

The Welsh Assembly want a better understanding of what it's like for young people who don't have a proper place to live in the Wrexham area. They want to understand what sort of things make it harder for young people to find somewhere to live, and what sort of things help young people to find proper accommodation. There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers – this study is interested in **your** thoughts, **your** opinions, **your** experiences and want you to **'Tell it as it is'**. The idea is that if we listen properly to young people and understand their experiences - then agencies and organisations should be in a better position to provide help. So this study wants to hear the experiences of young people who struggle to find a place to live. It is not often that young people themselves are asked for their views on this subject.

Who's involved?

- Julian Buchanan and Caroline Hughes from Glyndwr University.
- Menna Thomas and Caz Armstrong from Barnardo's/Compass

Can I get involved?

Yes if you are between 16-25years old and have had experience of not being able to find anywhere to live. Ideally, we are looking for six people to give us their support and advice and help throughout the study.

What'll be involved?

We are hoping that you might be interested in helping us do the study. We would like your help to decide the best way to go about the study, for example:

- Who to get in touch with.
- The best ways of getting in touch with young people who don't have a proper place to live.
- What to ask them.
- When and where to see them.

When will we meet up to talk about it?

We'll be around at Barnardo's/Compass on:

- Tuesday 12th May between 11am and 2pm
- Wednesday 13th May between 2pm-7pm

If you are interested call in and see us on either day. We can have a chat over a cup of tea or coffee but you are free to leave whenever you like without having to give a reason. Anything you say will be kept confidential unless you tell us about an illegal activity which we'd have to report. For your time and as a thank you for helping us, you'll be given a £10 Asda voucher. We would like to record the meeting with you, (so long as you agree) just so we don't forget anything.

Contact details

If you want any further info about the study, please speak to Caz Armstrong at Barnardo's/Compass. Or you can contact Julian or Caroline by email buchanani@glyndwr.ac.uk or hughesc@glyndwr.ac.uk or by telephone on 01978 293448.

Appendix 5: Advisory Group Consent Form

Advisory Group Consent Form

Please sign the statements below to indicate that you have understood and happy to help out with this study. Someone should have explained it to you and you should also have been given an information sheet. If you are not sure about anything just ask.

A copy of this consent form will kept by you and the researcher.

1. I understand the purpose of this meeting and what the research is about
2. I understand that my discussion with the researchers will be digitally recorded only with my permission.
3. I understand that taking part in this discussion is voluntary and that I am free to leave at any time, without giving any reason.
4. I understand that any personal statements I make during this interview will be kept confidential.

I have read the information above and agree to provide my comments and advice to assist with the 'Telling it as it is' study.


Respondent name.....

Respondent signature..... Date.....

Researcher Name:.....

Researcher Signature..... Date.....

Appendix 6: Research Information Poster



What are you waiting for? It's time to lead the change...


'Telling it as it is'


'IT'S TIME TO HAVE YOUR SAY'

The Welsh Assembly Government have asked Barnardo's and Glyndwr University to listen to young people in Wrexham to find out:

- what sort of things make it hard to find somewhere to live?
- what sort of things help you find proper accommodation?

If you are between 16-25 and have experience of not being able to find anywhere to live, then we want to hear from you. Get in touch with any of the people below for a confidential chat.



CALL:	OR DROP IN TO:	CALL:
Caz 01978 315130 or mob. 07805 875864	Barnardo's Compass Service Brynhyfryd 2 Grosvenor Road Wrexham LL11 1BU	Julian or Caroline 01978 293448
@ Credwch mewn plant Believe in children  Barnardo's Cymru	Every other Wednesday from 22 July after 2pm - or call to arrange a time to suit you.	