

Housing Briefing – *Too many young people are being set-up to fail*

Barnardo's Scotland runs a number of projects which supports vulnerable young people into and remaining in housing.

Many of the young people we work with are vulnerable due to age and circumstances and many are from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Many young people who are at risk of homelessness do not have a family support network and are at a higher risk of suffering from two or more issues, including drugs, abuse, unemployment, poor mental health, poor physical health, being involved in the criminal justice system, and being the victims of domestic violence.

Setting-up to Fail

Local authorities provide several housing options for young people, which are either supported accommodation units with 24 hour staff on duty, temporary furnished accommodation for emergencies and a permanent tenancy. Supported and furnished accommodation is a costly affair and young people who are working or on training courses find it difficult to keep up the payments due to the cost. Good supported accommodation does help bridge the gap between crisis homeless and being able to learn the skills required to manage a tenancy, but places are limited and not all young people will be offered this option

Permanent accommodation that is provided is not furnished, and it is a real difficulty for young people to try and furnish this to an acceptable standard. Most young people do not have the funds available to buy furniture and household goods to furnish their accommodation and most are not in a position to rely on family to help support them

Putting a young person, especially one from a vulnerable background, into accommodation where there is no furnishing or household goods is setting them up to fail.

From our experience of those that we work with, it is almost impossible to establish a stable and healthy living environment in an empty flat.

Without regular household items and furniture those living, or attempting to live in, an unfurnished property feel little pride or respect for it. They do not see it as a 'home', which can lead to the accommodation

being abandoned. We have also heard of residents allowing anti-social behaviour in the accommodation as they see it as less of a home and more of a public place for gatherings.

Councils can offer furnished housing to young people, however, the vast majority of this housing stock is temporary housing and the person is then moved on to permanent, unfurnished, accommodation.

Barnardo's Scotland also has a great deal of concern with regards to the quality and location of housing stock offered to vulnerable and disadvantaged young people.

Many young people are offered accommodation in unfamiliar areas far removed from their social and family support networks. These are vulnerable young people who rely on these support networks. They have often applied as emergency homeless applicants, and therefore have no choice in where they are given accommodation. These vulnerable people can be exposed and be susceptible to a number of problems such as crime, drugs and antisocial behaviour without being able to rely on their networks.

Community Care Grant

Those with limited funds moving into an unfurnished home can apply for the Community Care Grant to help them with the costs of setting up home.

There are, however, a number of issues that Barnardo's has with the current administration and working of the Community Care Grant.

- **Waiting too long** – Applicants can not apply for the Community Care Grant until they have successfully received their accommodation. This leads to a significant wait for funds during which time the young person has to live in an empty flat.
- **Too many rejections** – From our experience of working with young people there is an emerging pattern that more and more applications are being rejected. Many of these have been successful on appeal, which would indicate that proper care and consideration to first applications is not been given. There are number of concerns with this pattern, firstly, that people are waiting longer for their grants, which means their accommodation remains unfurnished. Secondly, those that do not appeal will not get the funds needed to furnish their flat,

but they are likely to have been successful if they had appealed. In many of these cases this sets that young person on the route to failure.

- **Not enough** – We are also concerned that the amounts been awarded to young people are becoming smaller and smaller, making it more difficult for those with grants to sufficiently furnish their homes.
- **No safeguard mechanisms** – Applicants receive awards from the grant scheme as a cheque. For many vulnerable young people moving into accommodation for the first time they are not always ready or in a position to understand household needs and budgeting. Barnardo's has heard of cases where money given through the grant hasn't always been spent on furnishings. Young people leaving care are awarded a Section 29 grant, which they use to support them in setting up a home. This grant is a supervised-spend and helps support the young person to spend the money on necessities. Barnardo's is not necessarily proposing that the Community Care Grant be administered in the same way as the Section 29 grant, but that Government should give some consideration to safeguarding and providing the right support for young people awarded grants.

Community Care Grant and Welfare Reform

Community care grants and other types of crisis loan will be devolved to Scotland under the UK Government's proposed Welfare Reform Bill. Within the devolved budget, the Scottish Government may redesign the system as it chooses.

With regards to the Community Care Grant Barnardo's would like to see following:

1. The Community Care Grant to be replaced with a similar grant that supports people setting up and staying in homes.
2. The system should allow applicants to apply for the grant prior to securing accommodation. Successful applicants would receive their grant on receipt of the keys to their accommodation to ensure no waiting time.
3. The application and approvals process for the new grant scheme should ensure that applicants are not unnecessarily rejected or systematically forced to go down the route of appeal.
4. Rules and criteria should be clear and consistently applied across Scotland.
5. That grant awards are of a sufficient level to allow applicants to properly furnish a home.

6. That safeguard measures for grants be considered.

Other actions

Barnardo's Scotland would also like to see:

7. Councils offer more fully furnished, permanent accommodation, at current unfurnished rental rates to ensure affordability. That the quality of furnishing must be appropriate to ensure a good standard of living.
8. That more support is provided for vulnerable and disadvantaged young people to ensure that they make a successful transition into independent living.

From our experience, voluntary sector-based housing support services have a distinct advantage in that they bring together multi-agency support for the young person who need help making the transition into independent living. The young people who use our service and others like it generally feel more comfortable with the voluntary nature of the service and are more prepared to use it compared to the statutory services provided.

Thought should be given by the Scottish Government with regards to how it can best use the voluntary sector to ensure that vulnerable young people make that successful move into their own home.