

Homeless not Voiceless

Learning from young people with experience of homelessness in the North East

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Believe in
children
 Barnardo's
North East

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Executive Summary

● The Aim of this Project

The overall aim of this project has been to identify how policy and practice might be developed to meet the needs of young people (aged 16-25) with experience of homelessness primarily in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

The questions addressed in this project were:

- The reasons why young people became homeless
- What young people found helpful when they became homeless
- What young people did not find helpful in exiting homelessness

Through their active participation in the project it has been possible for socially excluded young people to influence policy and practice in relation to youth homelessness.

● Policy and Research Background

Current research evidence would indicate that homeless young people have a range of practical, social, emotional and psychological needs.

For example Fitzpatrick (2000) in her review of the literature suggests that the 'individual' risk factors associated with homelessness include poverty, unemployment, sexual or physical abuse, family disputes and breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse, school exclusion and poor mental or physical health. Specific events such as leaving the parental home after arguments, marital or relationship breakdown, eviction, a sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in alcohol or drug misuse can 'trigger' homelessness. A lack of supportive factors such as strong support networks can also play a role (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000)

● Methodology

Data collection, through case studies, young people initiated project work and focus groups, took place between June 2009 and May 2010 and involved 106 young people with experience of homelessness and some of their workers.

Minutes of local consultations with homeless young people were also consulted. The young people had experience of services provided by 10 local authorities mainly in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

Findings and Recommendations

● Safeguarding homeless young people

Personal safety was a key issue raised by young people, in particular those who had lived in hostel accommodation. Many of the young people involved in this study who had lived in hostels could give examples of peer pressure, bullying, exploitation of various kinds, increase in substance use and criminal behaviour experienced in hostel accommodation. This further compounded the negative effects of previous life experiences and becoming homeless.

The system which is meant to help young people often places them in situations and cultures of negativity and hopelessness. This can place them at risk of a range of further harms. The outcome of this can be that they (the young people), because of their behaviour, can be seen as the “problem” when what is being observed is their reaction to the environment and cultures in which they have been placed.

● Listening to Young People

Listening can be a powerful tool to enhance the safety of young people by giving them the opportunity to talk about their concerns. Clearly such consultations should be structured to maximise the possibility of open communication without fear of, for example, eviction, withdrawal of service, loss of confidentiality etc. The recommendations from this study derive directly from the views of young people and there has been much learning through the project about effective ways to engage with young people to gather more realistic pictures of how services impact on them.

The inclusion of young people in various aspects of this project has helped develop their skills and confidence and has demonstrated how aspirations can be raised when young people initiated projects are combined with appropriate levels of support and incentives. This approach has also facilitated the civic re-engagement of some of these socially excluded young people through a range of influencing activities.

The process of awareness raising has led some young people to question what they previously saw as “normal” in their lives (e.g. negative influences in hostel accommodation) and reconsider their previous understandings of this.

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● Working Holistically

Adopting a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to working with homeless young people would ensure that homelessness was not purely defined by the need to provide safe accommodation. It would also include the need to address a whole range of factors, in particular mental health ones, that the research literature suggests is equally, if not more, relevant. These factors might be linked to the reasons for becoming homeless as well as the impact of homelessness itself and the services provided to support homeless young people.

● Reducing the stress on young people at the point of crisis

Young homeless people are likely to have reduced resilience by virtue of their family backgrounds. Becoming homeless can reduce this resilience even further. They are then expected to negotiate a complex, at times disjointed, system, often on their own with little support. This is exacerbated by social exclusion and poverty.

“One stop, drop-in centres” with more flexible opening hours than at present (i.e. evenings and weekends) should be available to young people in crisis. A range of issues could be addressed through one service point. Such centres would adopt a holistic, multi-disciplinary perspective and strong advocacy on behalf of young people. This would go a long way towards simplifying the system and reducing stress and risk taking behaviour at times of crisis.

● Developing evidence informed services

Services to homeless young people should recognise the psychological and emotional impact of homelessness and recognise that young people aged 16-25 are still developing physically, emotionally and psychologically and open to interventions that seek to address previous traumas.

Further work should be undertaken to identify the relative costs and benefits of the current range of services. This would inform the future development of services to homeless 16-25 year old young people.

The use of hostel accommodation should be reduced and the availability of other forms of safer accommodation such as Night Stop, Supported Lodgings and “Crash Pads” increased. Preliminary cost data suggests that Supported Lodgings cost 1/3 of a hostel place with better outcomes.

Executive Summary

The rationale for hostel accommodation should be explored. Where it is believed that hostel accommodation is the most effective answer to particular groups of young peoples needs then good practice from the child care field could be used as a template for developing hostel accommodation for 16-25 year olds. This would imply smaller hostels underpinned with a clearly articulated, evidence informed, theory of change. It would also imply higher staffing levels than currently exists.

In particular, it is suggested that 16/17 year old people should expect the same standard required of in-house services wherever they are placed by Children's Services.

● Changing the Benefits System

A more detailed analysis of the ways in which the benefits system impacts on homeless young people and their ability to escape poverty should be undertaken and in particular its impact on accessing training and work.

This will include the impact of Local Housing Allowance, the requirement to pay rent plus support charge when young people living in hostels start work and the poverty experienced by young people with experience of homelessness.

A widening of eligibility to Income Support up to the age of 25 for homeless young people could facilitate, for example, access to full time education and recognise the later development of some vulnerable young people.

● Recognising the impact of Poverty

Any intervention needs to take into account the current and previous impacts of poverty on the young person and how this impacts on their ability to sustain accommodation of various kinds.

Recent work for The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that a single person requires £175.34 a week (excluding rent) to achieve a socially accepted standard of living (Hirsch et al, 2010). The current JSA rate for a single person is £51.85.

● Safeguarding young people through a Human Rights approach

Studies such as this frequently argue for change from a needs perspective. However, another approach is to argue for change from a human rights perspective. In particular, all persons have the right to live their lives free from abuse and violence. This right is underpinned by the duty on public agencies under the Human Rights Act (1998). Further work will be done to explore how this approach might improve services to young homeless people.

Executive Summary

● Improving the quality of support to homeless young people

Young peoples' accounts suggest great variability in the quality of the various support staff who they encounter on their journeys through the homeless system. This includes staff in Local Authority Housing Departments, Leaving Care Social Workers, hostel support staff, out reach workers and "drop-in" centre staff.

The quality of support workers can not be left to chance as young peoples' futures often hinge on this. It is recognised that this is linked to service pay and conditions and the training of support staff.

● Challenging current legal definitions and categorisations of homeless young people

Much time and effort is taken at present assessing whether or not a young person is, for example, intentionally homeless or priority or non-priority need. In reality young people and workers will emphasise that such distinctions are meaningless and that all young people who are homeless are vulnerable and need support.

The appropriateness of current categorisations of young homeless people should be questioned. All should be treated as vulnerable and in priority need.

More work needs to be done to explore what happens to those vulnerable young people who fall into the categories of "Intentionally" and "Non-priority" homeless.

● Exploring Joint Commissioning

The possibilities for joint commissioning of work across local authorities should be explored. Is it realistic or cost effective for each Local Authority to have the full range of provision for homeless young people? What part might the joint commissioning of specialist regional services play? For example, joint commissioning of small well-staffed units to meet the specialist needs of young people with high levels of need or emergency crisis accommodation could be considered.

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Project Aims

The overall aim of this project has been to identify how policy and practice might be developed to meet the needs of young people with experience of homelessness primarily in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland.

The project is grounded in the perspectives of young people with first-hand experience of homelessness and uses their experiences of a variety of services to suggest how policy and practice can be developed to better meet their needs.

In particular it has addressed a key issue identified in discussions with a group of local practitioners as part of preparing this proposal:

“.....the impact of homelessness on young people in relation to their disillusionment with political systems and processes with the knock on effect of making them more marginalized and disengaged”

This project has focussed on young peoples’ experiences of homelessness and service responses to this and has aimed to:

....identify how people who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, acute forms of social exclusion define their own experiences and prioritise their own needs (Fitzpatrick, page 2, 2006)

One key aspect of acute social exclusion is the ability and opportunity to engage in the political process in its broadest sense (i.e. to be able to influence policy and decision making in respect of factors that affect one’s own life).

This project has explored the possibilities for socially excluded young people to influence policy and practice in relation to youth homelessness. It has done this by first enabling young people with experience of homelessness to identify issues of importance to them and supporting them in attempting to effect change in some way. Some of these young people have been recruited as peer researchers and peer educators to work alongside the project team.



Policy and Research Background

This project and related literature review has focussed mainly on what is known about homeless young peoples' needs and in particular psychological and emotional needs. This has formed the context to understanding young peoples' experience of and reaction to the services they receive.

A concurrent research project, commissioned by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC), was given the remit to identify "the true extent and effect of homelessness in the North East region, and what the region's response to this should be" (Housing Vision Consultancy and HQN, 2010). There has been communication between the two research projects with data from this project being submitted to the ANEC research team to inform their project. The two projects are likely to complement each other. The ANEC research contains a detailed analysis of what is known about the extent of homelessness in the North East.

Current research would indicate that homeless young people have significant physical, social and mental health needs.

The 'individual' risk factors associated with homelessness include poverty, unemployment, sexual or physical abuse, family disputes and breakdown, drug or alcohol misuse, school exclusion and poor mental or physical health. Specific events such as leaving the parental home after arguments, marital or relationship breakdown, eviction, a sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in alcohol or drug misuse can 'trigger' homelessness. A lack of supportive factors such as strong support networks can also play a role (Fitzpatrick et al, 2000)

Children and young people who have experienced some of the above traumas, are significantly more likely to develop emotional and behavioural disorders (Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2008). Among these factors, exposure to stressful life events was strongly linked with the development of emotional and cognitive disorders. The study also considered factors which may protect against the onset, or help children recover from, emotional and behavioural disorders. In both cases 'social capital' factors such networks of family and friends, participation in clubs and groups and perceived safety in the neighbourhood were strongly linked with emotional wellbeing. The school setting, and its influence on children's emotional wellbeing, was also considered in depth. The study suggests that the persistence and onset of a mental disorder can be linked to factors such as school exclusions, absenteeism and achievement at school, as well as the existence of special educational needs.

Stephens (2002), following an extensive review of the literature, suggests that

while 'rooflessness' may be the extreme end of the homeless continuum, fragile and insecure accommodation renders young people highly vulnerable to both potential rooflessness, and to many of the same psychosocial stressors....accumulating disadvantage and exposure to risk can make anyone susceptible to homelessness which in turn compounds vulnerability and stress (Stephens, 2002, page, 2)

Stephen's research suggests the following particular needs of homeless young people:

Poor mental health: Mental health problems are eight times as high for people living in hostels and bed and breakfast accommodation and eleven times higher for those whom sleep rough, compared to the general population.

Poor physical health: As with mental health, the homeless population tend to suffer from a similar range of physical problems as the general population, but more often and more severely due to restricted access to basic commodities.

Risk taking behaviour: Self neglect may result from a combination of practical barriers and the manifestation of mental health problems. Selfharming is thought to be relatively common among young homeless people and suicide is the biggest single cause of death among the street homeless. There is a relatively high prevalence of sexual risk behaviour among the young homeless population. Substance use also has a significant effect on security of domicile. Criminal activity can be an inevitable and unavoidable consequence of lengthy periods of insecure domicile. It is preferable to see this risk taking behaviour as something that can be treated, rather than as a dimension of some people's lives that may be to some extent deliberately chosen. Some young people who are homeless sometimes decide to commit a crime so they are put in jail and have somewhere to live.

Vulnerability: Young people understand the dangers of street living and harbour associated fears. Young homeless people are more likely to be the victims of crime rather than the perpetrators.

Social exclusion: Many young people with insecure accommodation have high levels of need. Homelessness degrades job opportunities, impedes the acquisition of social capital, undermines the young person's sense of identity and exposes young people to a wide range of dangers and stressors.

(Stephens, 2002)

Research by Crisis and St Mungos (2009) further underlined the mental health needs of homeless people and called for improved access to specialist services because of the high rates of problems being reported. Their research suggests that a third of people in hostels have severe mental health problems such as personality disorders. Once other conditions, including depression and anxiety, are taken into account as many as eight in 10 are affected.

Youth homeless populations are more likely to contain young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and/or experiencing disruption or trauma in childhood, are at increased risk of homelessness, and a significant minority experienced violence in the parental home (Quilgars, D et al, 2008)

Jarret comments

Until recently, research on homelessness was focused on economic issues and social policy. But gradually psychology and society are waking up to the psychological processes that lead many people to become homeless in the first place. Researchers are trying to pin down how people end up with nothing and how to get them back on their feet.

Therapists are listening to homeless people's stories, equipping them with the skills to cope and move on.

For homeless people with a complex, traumatic background, the elusive goal is often not to find hostel places - it's to keep hold of them. Many are trapped in a cycle in which their aggressive behaviour or substance abuse leads them to be ejected from hostels and back onto the streets. 'Getting kicked out is another rejection, It's another "life's not fair" experience, which just contributes further to the negative view they have of themselves.' (Jarret, C, 2010, page 3)

Related research literature on neglected adolescents (Stein et al, 2009) suggests links between neglect and/or neglectful parenting and negative outcomes which include:

- Risky health behaviours
- Running Away and bullying
- Poorer educational engagement, conduct and achievement
- Association between neglect and anti-social behaviour

The authors suggest that "in addition, negative outcomes in the above areas are also likely to contribute to a cumulative risk of poorer economic wellbeing in adulthood."

In many respects homeless young people have similar characteristics to care leavers (some of whom become homeless). Whilst the main difference will be that they have not been looked after within the care system they will have

- experienced traumas within their families that impact on their current ability to deal with stress;
- have problems with health, particularly mental health, conduct disorders and misuse of alcohol and drugs;
- have difficulties with relationships with family and friends;
- be young parents;
- feel affected by stigma and prejudice;
- experienced abrupt transitions which have been referred to as 'accelerated and compressed', further impacting on other aspects of their lives such as education, relationships and health and well-being.

(Elsley et al, 2007)

Methodology

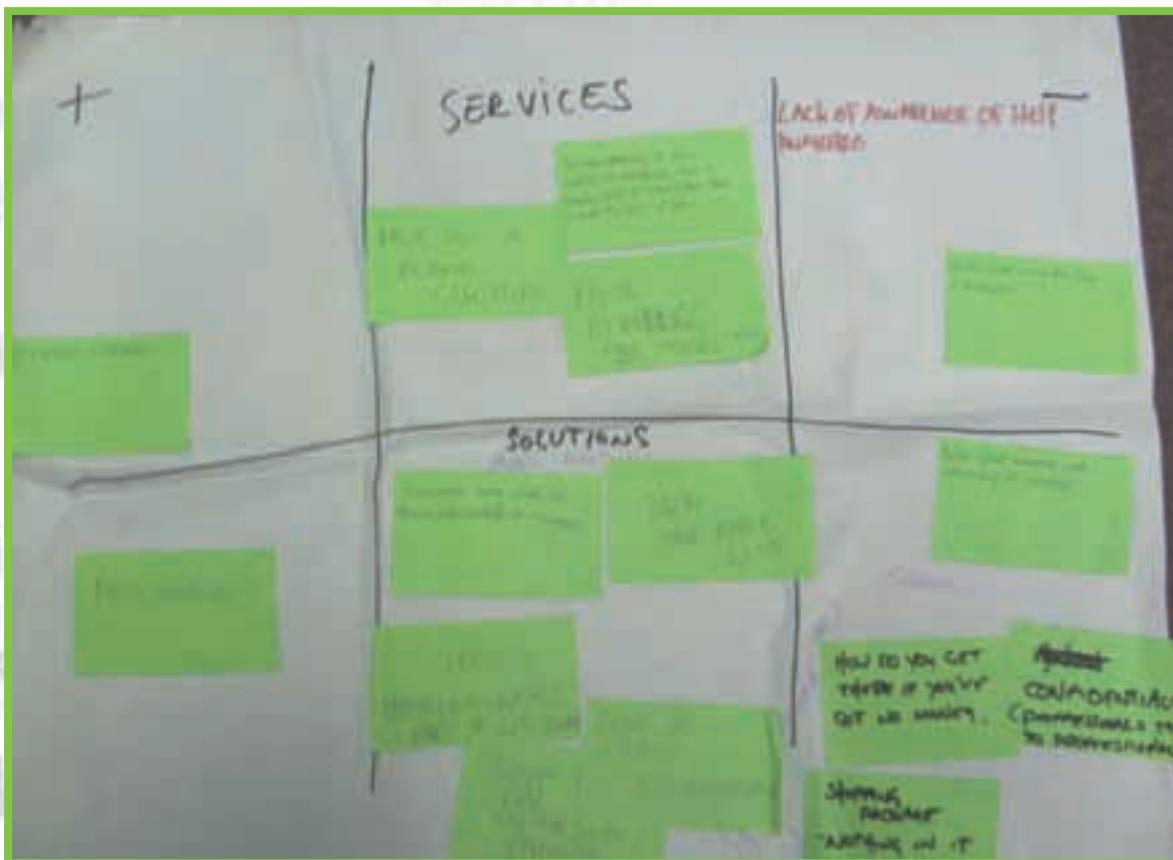
Data Collection

The project started by inviting a number of young people with experience of homelessness to discuss and plan how the project should be tackled.

This group of 21 young people and their workers met twice to plan the project and agreed that they would target a variety of accommodation types in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland and consult with a range of young people who have experienced or are still experiencing homelessness. This group had experience of 11 service types for homeless young people across Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. These services included drop in centres, Housing Advice Centres, hostel accommodation of various kinds, outreach support, Night Stop and Supported Lodgings.

These initial sessions were facilitated by a PEANuT team from Northumbria University (See Appendix 2) and were used to generate ideas for the project from young people and workers.

The aim was to use creative methods of data capture that would be visual and interest young people and also involve discussion and movement.



Exploring solutions to youth homelessness

Methodology

Each of the young people in the initial planning group agreed to be “case studies” for the project and was subsequently interviewed by members of the research team. The interviews were structured around the three main research questions:

- The reasons why young people became homeless
- What young people found helpful when they became homeless
- What young people did not find helpful in exiting homelessness

Some of the interviews were recorded to capture in detail young peoples’ experiences of services and to provide accurate quotations.

Some of these young people then undertook training in interviewing techniques to assist in the data gathering process by working alongside the research team when undertaking both individual and group discussions

The project has gathered information through “snowballing” (i.e. young people providing links to other young people with experience of homelessness) and specific targeting of services / young people. It started with the initial group of young people described above. It then gathered data from more young people in the services they were from and broadened out to include other services as they were described by young people. Focus groups of young people were also undertaken.

Of particular importance has been the role of young peoples’ support workers to facilitate:

- Contact between project team and homeless young people
- Data capture through, for example, undertaking focus groups / case studies

This has been invaluable for engaging with the young people in this study.

Where possible, these workers from the various services were also interviewed to obtain their perspective.

Minutes of relevant user group meetings were also consulted to cross reference issues raised by young people through this study.

Influencing activities, awareness raising and data collection

Within the main project a number of mini projects developed e.g. film making and a range of influencing activities (see Appendix 3). Through these activities, trust and confidence between young people and project staff grew further and more detailed information about young peoples experiences was gathered that was not given during the initial interviews. For example, during the film making critical aspects of life in hostels were acted out that had not been mentioned earlier in case study interviews.

Time Period of Data Collection

Data collection took place between June 2009 and May 2010.

Sources of data

Number and Age of Young people

The young people were aged:

Age	Number
16	9
17	10
18	16
19	11
20	14
21	12
22	12
23	10
24	9
25	3
Total	106

Source	Numbers
Young people case Studies	73
Young people - group sessions (7 sessions)	33
Support workers (hostels, drop-in centre, outreach, training centre, Night Stop, Supported Lodgings)	21

Types of services involved in this project

Young people and workers involved in this project represent the following mix of services:

- 15 hostels of various types
- 3 Supported Lodgings schemes
- 1 Night Stop
- 3 Outreach support services
- 1 Drop in centre
- 1 Training centre

Findings

The distribution and characteristics of current services provision

The various types of services explored in this study are not evenly distributed across Local Authorities. Thus, for example, not every Local Authority has access to Night Stop or Supported Lodgings. The various Supported Lodgings schemes are of differing size and have different service criteria (e.g. some may be restricted to 16/17 year olds, care leavers etc). Not all Local Authorities have drop in centres for vulnerable homeless young people.

One of the significant implications of this is that young people may be expected to access services some distance from their territories and “comfort zones” and existing support networks. Some decline to do this preferring the known to the unknown.

It is also important to note that hostel accommodation is a heterogeneous mix of various types of accommodation and its availability varies across Local Authorities. In this project hostels varied in terms of a number of criteria:

- **Size:** Hostel size varied widely from 8 - 60+
- **Type of residents:** Some were mixed gender others single gender. Some were mixed sexuality others single sexuality. Some were single issue, (e.g. ex-offenders) some mixed issue
- **Age range:** Some were the full age range (16+). Some were focussed on specific age ranges
- **Referral routes:** Some were direct access, some non-direct access having defined referral protocols through the Local Authority
- **Services provided:** Some did or did not provide food
- **Staffing levels and rota:** Some were and some were not staffed during the evening and through the night. Where there were night staff some were waking night staff whilst some were sleep in / on-call with panic buttons for young people. Some hostels employed security guards at night (some with / some without CRB clearance) rather than support staff. The use / reliance on volunteers to augment paid staff also varied across hostels.
- **The location of staff within buildings:** This was critical in determining their ability to engage with young people and monitor who enters the building. In most hostels staff were located in offices some distance from where young people lived within the building with little opportunity for regular interaction.

Reasons for becoming homeless

All of the young people had significant family issues that were directly related to their becoming homeless. These included:

- Domestic Violence
- Abuse of various kinds
- Substance misuse
- Criminal behaviour
- Parents dying
- Parents' divorcing or separating and new partners becoming part of the family
- Long histories of "not getting on" with parents / carers

This is consistent with much of the research literature outlined above. For many of these young people becoming homeless was a continuation of the neglect, stress and trauma that they had experienced through their lives.

There were other reasons for being homeless arising from events occurring after the young person left home and had found alternative accommodation. These included:

- Alcohol and substance misuse
- Eviction because of rent arrears
- Violent behaviour
- Leaving their accommodation through fear / harassment (see Safety below)

For a number of reasons these young people have entered into a cycle of repeat homelessness.

In presenting current figures for homelessness in the North East, the ANEC research comments on the level of repeat homelessness across the full age range:

Outcomes of supported housing are not good enough for all users: there were 3,539 repeat users of short term housing in the North East more than once in the period 2006-2009 who had been homeless or were in groups likely to have been at risk of homelessness; this was a quarter of all users, and people had used services up to 11 times over the three years (page 5).

Figures such as these are useful indicators of the effectiveness of various services. What can be learned from the scale of repeat homelessness about the effectiveness of current services? For example, do some services produce more repeat homelessness than others?

The emotional impact of becoming homeless

The actual event of becoming homeless was a continuation of negative events in young peoples lives (more so where this was repeat homelessness). Thus resilience, reduced by previous life events, was further reduced and for some young people it felt like their lives were out of control. It was as if they had become more sensitive to change and where the smallest adverse event could have a major impact. One young person described it thus:

It's like when I started F*ing up I couldn't stop – I wasn't thinking straight. I just didn't know what to do...it's like once one thing went wrong everything went wrong. Things that would have been nothing before became great obstacles.***

One young man described the series of events he experienced:

I spent several years moving between my two separated parents and my girlfriend's house – rootless really. I was 18 going out, getting drunk every night, coming back doing daft things. I became homeless and was referred to the Salvation Army by HAC, I was in a mess not thinking straight – I couldn't get my head round sorting my benefits out so I went down - never signed on the dole or anything like that, I think I was 19 at the time or 18. I didn't know what to do so I went down and stayed there; stayed there 2 weeks and they've come back "have you sorted out your job centre stuff out"? I say's "I am still busy trying to do it" They said "well you can't stay here, and you aren't getting housing benefit so you will have to leave". So they've asked me to leave and I went sofa surfing a few days, well a few weeks actually it was then I went to the YWCA in X staying in there you don't get no support or anything like that, you've got people there for twenty odd years and that, they're happy there, they'll be there all their lives, it's their home, it's a room you're in with no toilet or anything. Big hostel with 70 odd rooms in there, you get breakfast, dinner, there's only two kitchens in the full place. There's bathrooms in each cluster, you claim housing benefit for that and you are still paying £16 something a week and you are getting two meals a day and the meals were nice, you don't mind paying it when you are getting a decent meal. The breakfast in the morning wasn't the best but in the afternoon you are getting a good tea for £16 per week you cannot go wrong with that.

Then there was a fight there outside and obviously I was there and I saw what happened, I wasn't involved I was just there. 12 people got evicted for being there so that's it I was actually homeless only for about two weeks or something like that, sleeping at the back of Greggs, keeping warm from the heaters on there.

Findings

A young woman described her lack of positive self-expectations:

Looking back – I had no confidence – no real options – hard to get out of the culture that I was in. I never expected more of myself. I was always amongst people like me.

One young man described how

I had been homeless on a number of occasions. I stooped to a new low on boxing day. I broke into a block of flats with my friend because I had been evicted from my flat the day before. Me and my friend slept on the landing and cuddled up to his dog for warmth.

I then went through a stage of sofa surfing and I then lived with an alcoholic who I met in some pub – this was not good for me. I was drinking nearly 20 litres of cider a day. My baby was born and that changed me.

A focus group of young people held at the outset to this project listed out some of their thoughts and feelings during this crisis period of help seeking:

- Lack of knowledge / information
- Lack of self-esteem
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Language barriers (e.g. not understanding the terms being used by various workers they met)
- Scared (e.g. going on their own to new places)
- Lacking in confidence
- Ashamed at being homeless

A worker summed up her experience of working with homeless young people at crisis times:

If you have no hope, feel bottom of the pile, “I’m never going to have a job, never have relationship or kids” – you will have no investment in society – It’s the worse thing – lack of hope – just giving up.

The point at which young people present as homeless is clearly one of acute stress with diminished resilience and poor coping mechanisms.

At this time of crisis with few personal resources some young people then had to navigate the homeless “system”.

The availability of information at the point of becoming homeless

Young people emphasised the lack of information about available services at the point that they became homeless. During this period of reacting to what, for some, was the shock of becoming homeless and trying to find out what to do and where to go, temporary solutions were adopted which included rough sleeping in vans and tents and on the streets and sofa surfing, often with people who the young person knew little about and had met in risky situations.

What helped at this stage was contact with key people who noticed something about the young person and initiated some discussion about their situation. This included college lecturers, mentors and support staff in training centres. For some this was, however, good luck in having access to a perceptive person.

It's important that staff here can recognise signs of distress and then know how to deal with it – this is tied in with a culture of nurturance (Staff member in training centre)

What young people find the most helpful are “one stop”, young people friendly, informal services where they can go and receive a holistic proactive service that meets a range of needs. These are few and far between with most services being issue specific. At present becoming homeless can involve the young person in having to have involvement with a number of agencies at a time of great personal stress.

The general consensus amongst young people was that:

We need a ‘one stop shop’ – somewhere to go to get information and be safe. There needs to be more information about what support there is out there even if it is very little!

We need to improve communication so that young people can be directed to the right place in times of crisis. More drop in centres where you get information that's user friendly and looks appealing

Additionally, few services operate outside of “office hours” (Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm).

As all workers and young people commented – problems can occur at any time and, for a number of reasons, are probably more likely to occur evening and weekends when families spend longer periods of time together.

There should be a free 24 hour phone acting as a helpline for victims of homelessness. It's like they assume that things don't happen after 5.00pm or weekends (Focus Group)

The homeless assessment process

Entry into the official homeless system comes by presenting as homeless to the Local Authority who can make a decision about whether or not the young person is intentionally homeless, priority or non-priority need (see Appendix 1 for definitions of “priority need”).

A key challenge for services in helping young people at this time of crisis is described by one worker:

When in chaos and crisis young people do not always do logical things and, for example, do not turn up for appointments etc. This can be the result of a number of things – trauma, stress, depression, feelings of worthlessness, the result of drug use, lack of structure to life etc. It needs a lot of intensive support and we don't always have the time!

A support worker suggested:

Young people in crisis need a worker to help them navigate the system. In crisis young people need a worker to go with them to relevant services. Can these be brought together in some way? In a crisis young peoples confidence and resilience is at a low ebb.

They are at their most vulnerable and expected to complete complex forms, understand legal definitions of homelessness and advocate for themselves. At a time of crisis young people can't navigate the system – they need intensive personal support to do this.

Young people commented frequently on the poor “people skills” that many staff they encountered had. It seems to be luck whether a young person gets a friendly, supportive worker or not in a range of settings.

One worker who works with young people at the point of their becoming homeless commented:

I really think you need to comment on the lack of support of the Council that all young people mention – the difficulty for us all in understanding the government's housing system and the Council seems to do everything in its power to avoid a duty to house and giving any support. As a worker I feel young people are regularly talked down to and made to feel inferior.

As a worker I am often spoken to like I am stupid and unable to understand how decisions are made. I often feel powerless to help young people as the Council have so much control in deciding the fate of young people.

Findings

Another worker who signposts homeless young people across several local authorities in the Region commented on the variety of responses that she gets from a range of workers she has to negotiate with on behalf of homeless young people:

It can depend on who you get on what day – there is too much inconsistency of responses – it should not be just down to luck! I find it difficult so I’m sure young stressed out people will find it even more so – no wonder they give up!

In particular, young people who are assessed as being “non-priority” or “intentionally homeless” face considerable challenges in finding suitable accommodation. The response of Local Authorities varies with this group. It can include giving lists of possible accommodation which the young person then has to pursue themselves. It may include referral to other services such as drop in centres where workers may then assist the young person to access whatever accommodation may be available (which may include bed and breakfast). It might also include referral to hostel providers or simply stating that there is no accommodation available.

One young man commented:

I am deemed non-priority – I don’t have a kid – they just gave me a list and told me to ring round – no one seemed to care that I had no where to stay. I had no money to ring round. Just to be given a list and “Good Luck” – I needed more than that – Ok I may not be priority need according to them – but I’m 18 and need help!

Workers and young people have consistently challenged this distinction between priority and non-priority need.

It’s not fair because as a young man who was homeless I couldn’t get the help that I needed from the homeless unit people. Yet if I was a young woman who was pregnant or with a child she would get priority homeless...how can that be fair when in fact we both need a roof over our heads.

Other young people make their own arrangements and in so doing can form relationships in return for solving their accommodation problems. This can lead both young men and women putting themselves in vulnerable situations.

One young man told of how he moved in with an older woman when he was homeless:

...as long as I keep her sweet I can stay there – if you know what I mean - I’d be homeless otherwise

A young woman told of how she moved in with a young man when she was homeless and formed a relationship with him and subsequently became pregnant:

This was more to solve my accommodation problem than because I loved him – we get along ok but I don’t really love him!

Findings

Another young woman (aged 19) said:

I always got with the same sort of lads – I just thought that this was the norm – what I deserved – nothing better!

Two young women described their experiences after being told they were non-priority homeless:

We were told we were non-priority homeless and contacted this lad who we knew – not very well - he got in touch with a friend who had a spare bedroom and he arranged for us to be picked up. We stayed there for a week or so. He was a complete stranger – there were people in his house all the time who we did not know – I also felt cheeky because I did not know him. No money to give him – no lock on the door. Things went missing – mobile phone – not ideal but no where else to go. Stayed there for a week. The lad whose house it was decided to let someone else stay there on the sofa – this lad had some friends round – they all got off their heads on drugs and they ripped the fireplace off the wall – smashed CD’s (me and my friend were in bed at the time) – it was pretty scary we did not know what would happen to us - the lad whose house it was had rung the police to get them out – they threw us out as well.

Some concern was also expressed about the way in which some young people are assessed as being “Intentionally homeless”. One young man described how he had walked out of hostels because he did not feel safe and was subsequently deemed to be intentionally homeless.

The council placed me in this hostel – it had 30 rooms - all men – some much older than me – some ex-prison – some drug addicts – there were needles everywhere – I only stayed for a couple of days – I just couldn’t hack it - the council said that I’d made myself intentionally homeless.

A worker also expressed concern

about those categorised as being intentionally homeless therefore no duty, under the Local Authority’s interpretation of the Homeless Legislation. Even when harassment could be presented as a reason for a young person to leave their tenancy, they can still be assessed as making themselves intentionally homeless.

An outreach worker suggested that

Young people are blamed for “messing up” but in reality it’s the system that’s failed by putting someone in that situation with few skills or support. Vulnerable young people become easy targets because they are recognised as so by others in the locality – like bees to honey - they become harassed and end up deserting their accommodation to escape harassment. They just can’t cope.

Safety

By far and away the biggest concern that homeless young people expressed has been about the safety of some of the accommodation in which they are placed by statutory services.

One young man said:

I was placed in a hostel. There were drugs, needles, people with alcohol problems. There was a wide age range. I was one of the youngest there. I had one meeting with staff when I moved in but then nothing else – he kept saying “We need to catch you” but it never happened – He kept saying “We will meet on Tuesday” but never gave me a time or anything and it did not happen. I would not stay in the building because of what was happening there – I did not feel safe – I just left.

Another young man said:

It was wrong to place me with older young people – I wanted to be accepted by them and joined in all their behaviour and doing drugs that I had not done before.

Another young man said:

There were lots of dangerous situations while living in the hostel as I had lots of fights. There were always fights even though there were strict rules that there was no fighting allowed in the building. People would just take it outside to avoid staff calling the police. A lot of fights were just to keep a reputation of being hard. A lot of fights were over girls, owing people money and peoples lack of respect. If there was someone who had to be up early for work and got disturbed by shouting or loud music it could lead to fights.

A young woman described her experience:

I was placed in an all-female hostel. I was in a shared flat with another 36 year old female. She shot up once in front of me and I told her I did not like it – I always had a friend with me after that if I was to be on my own with her.

Another young woman said of hostels:

They are full of drunks and druggies – how do we know who are in these places or if they are safe?

Findings

An outreach worker said:

In temporary accommodation young people meet other vulnerable people of all ages and with all sorts of needs – they will drink more - take drugs more – because more stressed – what else can you do – what do you do where do you go – no money – in limbo – they need to deal with stress in some way. It becomes another problem to deal with!

Specific issues raised by young people included:

i) Bullying and negative peer pressure

A young man talked of his desperation when his room was trashed:

Whilst I was in the hostel I felt at risk due to one particular young person who had been banned from the project but for some unknown reason he was allowed back in. The result of that meant my room got trashed and there was not enough control by staff to manage the young people properly. I felt I couldn't stay there any longer and even my own room, the place that was meant for me to have my own things and to feel protected, was trashed leaving me desperate to get out. At that project the staff lacked control and had no passion.

One young man commented on access to help through the night:

There is no supervision at night – there are panic buttons – but I couldn't use those – it would only make things worse – I'd be seen as a grass - it was bad enough without that – I had to live there.

A young man described his own process of “toughening-up”:

Personal safety – I have to say – there was a lot of trouble at the end. There were people who smashed the windows – the manager and staff came together and kept us safe. There were a lot of things that happened in there that they could have done a better job on – There was one lad in there, who got bullied everyday – almost casually – as if it was normal for everyone to torture this kid – physical and mental torture – he was an introvert – which I am – but you have to pretend to be an extrovert – but I don't think he had the skills to do that – I managed to do it – he just cowered away and people latched onto that to make themselves look stronger – I used to say to the staff – “He needs a little bit of help” – I was trying to give him a bit of support – I saw a few times the staff joining in – it seemed like the staff joined in and encouraged it – I found out that after I left – there was another lad in there who got the lad to take the rap for something that he had not done which meant he got thrown out – and I then found out that he had slit his wrist.....

Findings

A staff member remarked:

Sometimes we are aware that bullying may be going on but other young people will not tell us about it – afraid of the consequences – they won't grass because of the consequences.

One young man who was working said

I was working and could not sleep at night – the noise - people were up all night – some on ecstasy – I lost it a few times – I had a few fights – I was worn out trying to work with little sleep.

One young man in receipt of Disability Living Allowance described how he was targeted by others for his money.

Staff did not know it was going on – they only intervene if there are fights. They did not want to know and I could not grass on the people doing it to me it would have been worse.

ii) Sexual Exploitation / coercion

One young woman described some of the harassment she had experienced in a hostel.

I don't think I was raped but it was like I couldn't say "No" – he was kind of pressurising me and I was a bit afraid! They were always making suggestions to us – giving us drink and skunk to loosen us up..

One young man told of how he was offered £100 by another resident if he masturbated in front of a couple of men.

I was really tempted – I needed the money – I very nearly said that I would do it – I came very close.

A young man described how exploitative relationships develop to feed drug habits.

It's like people become a means to an end to getting money so I can get the drugs I need. These aren't really trusting two way friendships – they are just to get what I need – once I've got that I move on.

An outreach worker who works in a service for young people at risk of sexual exploitation said:

It's hard for young people – they are put in risky situations – like B&B – through this work I'm more aware of sexual exploitation – I am more aware of how risky some of the situations are for young people....how they can be targeted both by people within their accommodation as well as outside.

Findings

A graphic account was given by one young man:

There was one lass who moved in – she was still in school – she sang in the choir – there was this lad who came in who was friends with a lass who already lived there – he started trying to get into this young lass – she told him loads of times that she did not like him – one morning I was sitting making a bacon sandwich – she came down in a right mess and the other lasses were saying that she had lost her virginity to some kid she did not even know who had got her mortal and had sex with her – both ways – that’s what they said – and I was just sitting there – she came into this place like she did and look at her now – she is going to come out the way that she is now. The first time they gave her cannabis – she had a panic attack and went to hospital – she gets sucked into the group and ends up getting shagged – in the toilet from someone she don’t even know – I don’t think it was rape – I think it was the role models she had to look at – she should have been looking at the staff for leadership but it never came – there was the drugs that changed her mind – drink that sort of makes you do anything – she would never have done that if she had not been in that place....

A young man who had experienced homelessness and just moved into his own flat after being in a hostel described the aftermath of one of the film making sessions run as part of this project. Barnardo’s had a media campaign focussing on sexual exploitation at the time and this was discussed in the group.

When we had that discussion about sexual exploitation at the last group meeting I couldn’t look at her [another group member] – I just looked at the floor because I knew what she would be thinking. She got into debt where she was living because she was working I think – she had got to know some pretty mucky people and they had got into scamming some banks – something like that – fraud schemes and stuff like that – to pay some of her debts off they were asking her to exploit herself sexually to settle her debts – what she owed them – it’s so easy to target us – the temptation for me to get into more debt is really, really big at present – the adverts and things I’m seeing at the minute – offering to lend money – loan sharks – in my situation people become desperate.

iii) Increased alcohol and substance misuse

Some young people described the impact on their use of drugs and alcohol and subsequent criminal behaviour.

I’m a care leaver I left my foster home because I did not like my carers and I was placed in this hostel. When I went into the hostel I had no criminal record or drug habit but when I left I had both!! I came out the opposite. I started to use dope and sometimes stole to get money for this. I couldn’t get away from them – they were always knocking on my door sometimes at 4.00am for tabs!

Alcohol was banned from the building even for the over 18’s but the residents would sneak it in which would lead to a lot of fights, arguments and one night stands. There were always new people moving in and the younger ones would start drinking and taking drugs to fit in.

Findings

A young man said:

I went into the hostel – I didn't do anything (i.e. drugs) at that time. I then started using green (cannabis) and was asked to do some running in the place to make some extra money and pay for my green. I was then accused of being a grass and was intimidated for months before I was asked to leave because I wasn't up to date with my rent.

One young man in a hostel described how he used drugs of various kinds:

Drugs block out feelings but I know I'm in a vicious circle of drug taking / shame / guilt / more drug taking. It will never change whilst I am in here. It is better to feel nothing than have all my feelings – my drugs help me forget everything – to escape.

One young man who is now in supported lodgings was able to look back at his time in hostels and said:

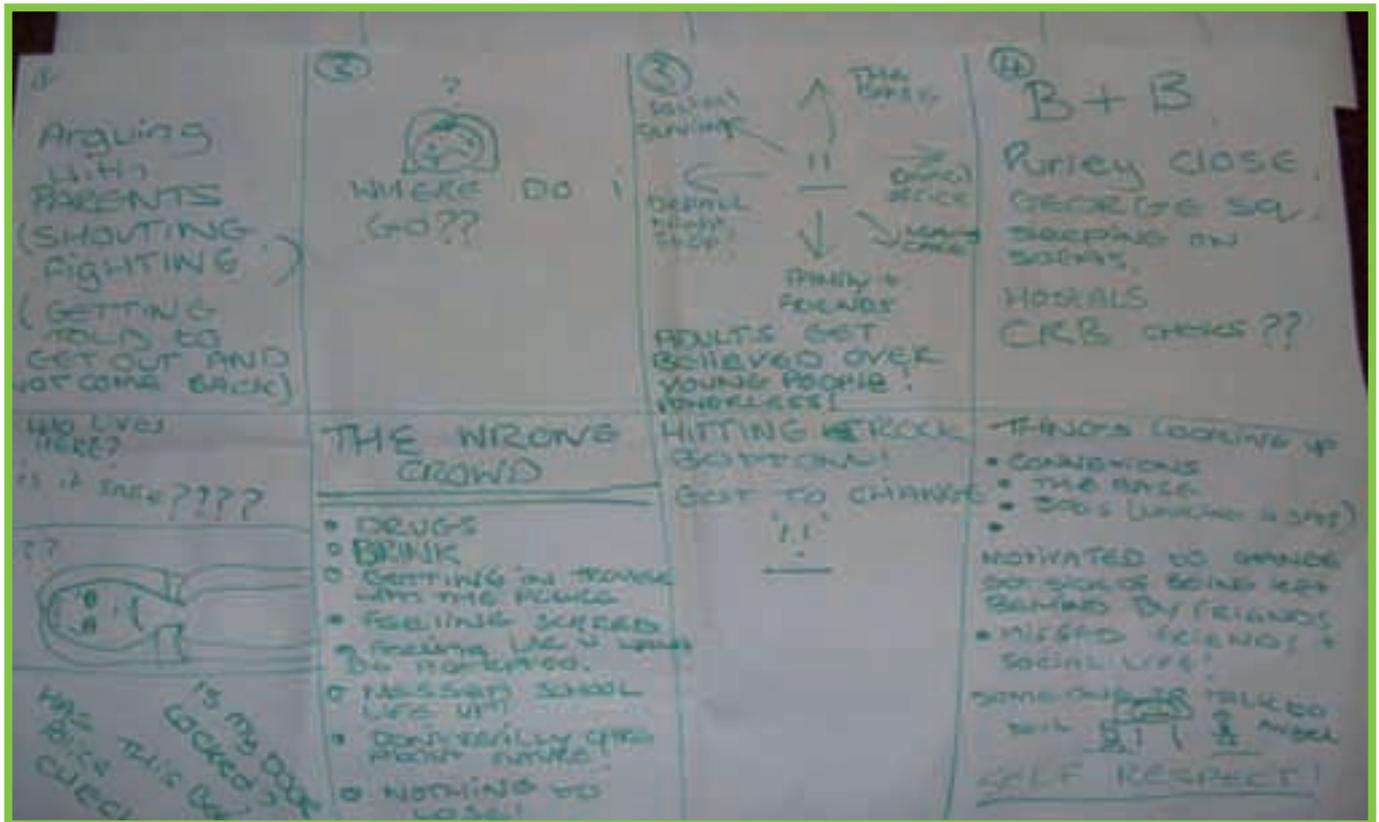
Hostels are a waste of space – put wrong people with wrong people – what do they expect will happen? If you put vulnerable people with druggies – it just continues it.

One young man suggested the following to improve hostels:

It should be more family oriented – strong (male) role models – it was all female staff – they couldn't hack it - and when it was all kicking off I had to help the staff – if there was strong male with good sense of right and wrong – good sense of moral awareness – to lead the young lads into more positive ways – the whole mentality of the place is to smoke dope, fight etc – there are no other role models there – some of the young people have already been in that culture and they can't really change much when they go in there – but a different environment would change that – some good rules – take part in the house – do jobs – take pride in it – make meals together – I wanted to learn how to cook when I was there – there was student over from Germany who was teaching us how to cook – I wanted to learn how to make curry – half the kids there just ruined it on purpose they didn't care – there should be more rules more stability – more positive role models

A young woman suggested that if we are to continue to use hostels greater matching should be attempted:

Young people who are in a homeless situation deserve to be treated as a priority first and they should have safe accommodation. When people go into hostels it would be good to separate out social groups, rather than putting everyone together and then hope people will get along with each other and hope it then works out – it doesn't – how can it?



Exploring Homelessness through “Story Boarding”



16 / 17 year old young people and Care Leavers

Whilst the above issues are of concern for all young people aged 16-25, of particular concern are those aged 16/17. Examples have been found of 16/17 year olds being affected by the same safety issues described above.

These young people, who are legally children, are the responsibility of Children's Services Departments working in partnership with local housing providers (the under-18's protocol).

The data from a Barnardo's drop-in centre in Whitley Bay, North Tyneside showed that in the financial year 2009-2010, of the 110 young people aged 16-25 who were accommodated in B&B in the area, there were seven young people aged 16 and 17 placed there by four Tyne and Wear local authorities.

Whilst current guidance is to not use B&B for 16 and 17 year old homeless people, less emphasis has been placed on other types of accommodation such as hostel accommodation.

None of the hostels and B&B's encountered during this study would meet National Minimum Standards required for in-house services.

Logic would suggest that these young people should expect the same standard required of in-house services wherever they are placed by Children's Services.

Sixty two Care Leavers attended the drop-in centre in Whitley Bay in 2009-2010. Of these, 25 were in B&B, hostels or roofless and originated from six North East Local Authorities.

Care leavers featured prominently amongst the young people interviewed. One staff member highlighted their particular needs:

Care leavers are just not prepared for the culture of hostels – they have little understanding of the consequences of their actions because of the culture of care where there are limitations on what boundaries can be put in place. They come into hostels where they have to organise their own lives – it's a complete culture shock - and, because they have few if any social support networks, are very dependent on the group and are very susceptible to the negative influences of others.

One care leaver said:

Living in the hostel was a big learning curve. It was a big change from living in a family environment to then living with loads of people with no ambition, drug & alcohol problems.

Group Dynamics

Hostels consist of people living in groups. Many of the concerns expressed by young people can be understood, in some measure, by reference to group dynamics. When young people are placed in group living situations (e.g. hostels) group dynamics become a significant issue and present considerable challenges for staff and young people.

The lack of ability to match young people to accommodation based on their need combined with pressure to fill beds to meet occupancy level targets can result in group mixes that present significant challenges to staff and which can add to the instability of group living situations.

One hostel worker commented:

Group living is a barrier sometime – groups hold people in them. Quite happy living in the group bubble – these are the hardest – pockets – some bigger than others. 9/10 they are big pockets. I have offered some young people to come away on residential but they have turned that down because they wanted to stay with the group.

I always have to give time to those causing the most trouble – especially at night – it's the antics they get up to – knocking on peoples' doors – bogged down keeping a lid on anti social elements and it's the other vulnerable young people miss out – the ones who need the time – don't have the time because bogged down with the other group causing trouble.

Another staff member said:

Little matching is possible – we have all sorts of young people with a whole range of needs placed here – it's very difficult to address all of these.

Catching them to work with them is quite difficult – lots of young people come to the hostel and it's very difficult motivating them – they have a warm room – stay for a while – forget that it is only temporary – problem of engagement – many times the manager has to come and talk to the young person because they have not done something that they should have done – gives a warning. “If you do nothing – you will have to leave”.

A young person commented:

I was tempted into loads of crime when I was there – you become a product of your environment – you had to become the best – at getting lasses, getting drugs, doing crimes – that's the mentality. The only way to survive in that situation was to become the alpha male – my way to fit in – the reason I was Ok with everyone – I fitted into the alpha male slot – I was quite authoritative with every body – it's the way I became when I was in there – it's not me really – I cottoned on that that was the only way to survive

Findings

A worker with extensive experience of working with young people in residential settings explained it thus:

Homeless young people are vulnerable, suggestible /and chaotic. They can have blurred or no template or yardstick by which to judge what is acceptable or not, right or wrong. They may have internalised stereotypes of homelessness – “This is all I am worth”. These stressed young people are then placed into group living situations (hostels) with few boundaries and insufficient staff to address their complex needs. The stress can be further compounded through group processes. Furthermore, in being placed with, for example, ex-criminals and the associations that are made between homelessness and offending this can reinforce the belief that “I must be bad”

One hostel staff member described the challenges of working with young people around drug issues:

....if I’m trying to work with someone on drug issues I know that I need to work with the group as well as the individual because in here (a hostel) it’s a group activity. It’s so much harder dealing with individual issues where there is a group influence. Trying to do work in isolation with an individual is almost impossible. But we are not geared up for group work...

Group dynamics can also work in other ways. One young man said:

There are not enough jobs! It’s so discouraging that even when you try your best, putting out CV’s going to the job centre and even getting interviews that you’re still not able to find work. Even listening to the person who is in here who has a job is great but it make me feel that I cannot make it and is there something wrong with me...almost feel devalued by not succeeding

One young person looking back said:

I just had no confidence – I did not see that I had any real options – hard to get out of the culture that I was in. I never expected more of myself. I was always amongst people like me. It’s like we all have lots of needs, we are alone and we latch onto anyone we think will help.

A worker commented:

I don’t think we address the whole thing of group living very well at all. In my experience the size of the accommodation that is available is always too big. If you look at the research it suggests max 6 but normally 3 young people living together. Something that would be like the size of a family unit which addresses all the young person’s needs not just the housing part of it. I don’t think that group living for me actually works. Group dynamics / hierarchies within those groups, these need careful consideration to identify how they impact on the living situation. We need to build resilience but without appropriate staffing levels / skills group dynamics can work against this.

Findings

A young man with wide experience of living in several hostels said:

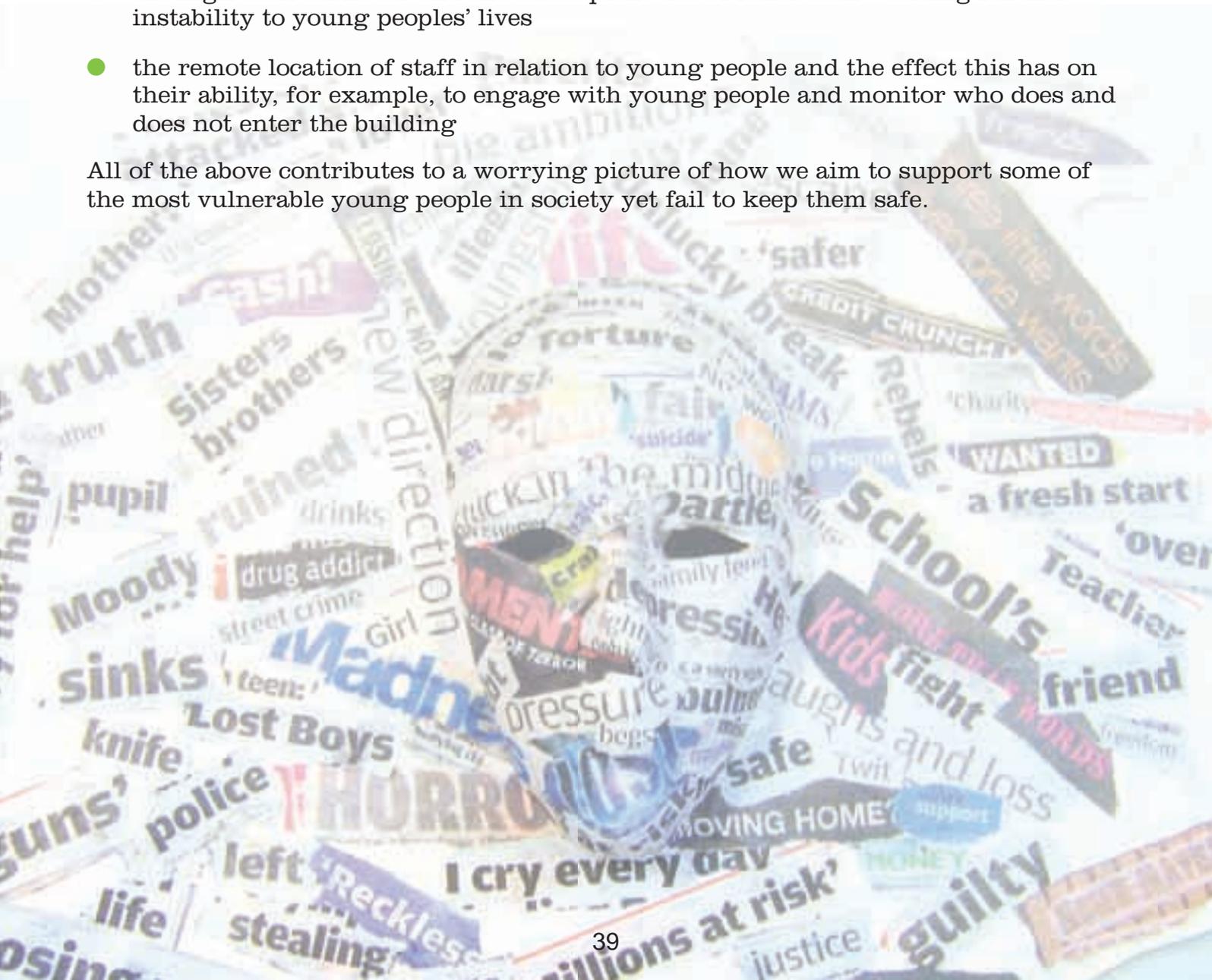
I've seen it in other places – there are some good young people who want to move forward – have good heads on their shoulders – but the peers that are around them or living with them – they will start to take the mick out of them if they go out and try something new – they get dragged back into the group

Similar concerns have been expressed by workers (both residential and field workers) who have witnessed the negative impact of group dynamics first hand.

They have highlighted the following issues as being of relevance:

- poor staffing levels
- the size of hostels (too big)
- inadequate staff training
- the (low) pay and working conditions of hostel staff
- the high staff turnover and the subsequent use of relief staff – adding further instability to young peoples' lives
- the remote location of staff in relation to young people and the effect this has on their ability, for example, to engage with young people and monitor who does and does not enter the building

All of the above contributes to a worrying picture of how we aim to support some of the most vulnerable young people in society yet fail to keep them safe.



Safeguarding, staffing and the physical characteristics of hostels

The nature of the group dynamics discussed above will be influenced by the structure and characteristics of the hostel (see *The distribution and characteristics of current service provision*, above).

For example, safeguarding is influenced by the ability of staff to spend time with young people and listen to their concerns. Staff / resident ratios often do not allow for this. A staff member commented:

With the number of young people I have to key work I can give each 3 hours per week – it only takes a couple of crises and the rest get forgotten – it’s hard to give young people intensive support.

Some hostels are staffed by one member of staff for much of the day / night and as one staff member described it:

“Care” becomes containment rather than protection and enablement. As a consequence police support can become a regular part of managing group living problems or young people avoid their accommodation or just leave putting them at further risk in the community and of being deemed to be intentionally homeless.

A young man in a hostel commented on staff thus:

I think that the staff in the hostel were great and tried their best to help the young people but they couldn’t control what went on and some people just didn’t want to be helped. We all needed so much!

Another worker with experience of addressing youth homelessness in another European country commented on the lack of contact with some young people:

It’s like a bureaucratic model here – paperwork – staff are remote in the office – it feels like this can be used to avoid contact with young people. Staff appear apart from young people here – it’s very hard to impact on group dynamics when we are so distant and not amongst young people.

We write letters to young people – slip them under their doors – some times there is little effort to engage with young people – more like administering rules / containing rather than development and growth. Many times at staff handover – they report no contact with young people.

Thus the physical positioning of staff in relation to young people can be a key factor in influencing group dynamics and safeguarding the welfare of these vulnerable young people. Staff are frequently located in offices at some distance from where young people live and socialise and vary in the extent to which they can, for example, influence who does and does not enter the hostel.

It’s very difficult to stop people either being sneaked in or strangers getting in by following residents in. Hostels are targeted because they are known to house vulnerable young people.

Findings

The ability of services to check on the background of residents also appeared to vary with some organisations being able to carry out what appeared to be detailed checks (including police checks) whereas others relied on information provided primarily from young people and / or their workers. One supported lodgings host commented:

Quite rightly I had to be police checked, assessed and references taken up. Do we ensure that all residents in hostels and B&B s are similarly checked to ensure the safety of young people who are placed there? Do we really assess how safe young people will be in the accommodation we place them in?

One worker suggested:

If we are to continue with hostel accommodation then it should be of good quality with appropriate support and quality of staff, who will work to and implement anti-discrimination policy/procedures, develop a structured activity programme and not keep the young person too long. To have provision of different types and sizes of hostel accommodation and ensuring the right mix of young people in them and to ensure that each young person's room has its own facilities such as kitchen and bathroom. Ensure that young people are properly assessed and matched to the accommodation on offer. Hostels would be small with staff much better integrated into where the young people are.

A member of staff of one hostel described what it felt like to him:

We are all stretched – staff come and go – staff need time to get trained and inducted before they become operational – then there is relief staff – young people know when they are on that they can be a softer touch – they have no relationship with the young people – no investment in the service. Continuity becomes a problem. A lot of paperwork, flu going round, sickness levels – tonight I am on my own with one person on the desk. There is a high turnover rate – stressful job not well paid.

Vulnerable homeless young people vary in what support networks they have outside of their accommodation. It appears that where young people are mostly dependent on others within the hostel, and share more facilities, they are more likely to be affected by group dynamics. Conversely, where young people have retained significant relationships outside of hostels (and share fewer facilities) they are less likely to be so dependent on the group and influenced by it. This is a significant issue when considering safeguarding. A key element of safeguarding for any group of people is the access they have to supportive people outside of potentially abusive situations. The staffing issues described above add to this as hard-pressed staff have a reduced ability to protect individuals from some of the negative consequences of group dynamics.

A young man living in a hostel commented:

It's not they don't want to help us it's that their time is filled up with the young people who are arguing fighting harassing people, making a mess of the property – trying to maintain a level of normality – keep a lid on it – and stop the place going into chaos – because their time is consumed in that you don't get the support you need to move on.

Safety and other forms of accommodation

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Whilst concerns about hostel accommodation featured very highly, the same concerns also applied to other forms of accommodation such as bed and breakfast (B&B) which is still being used by some Local Authorities to house homeless young people.

During the course of this research we interviewed a number of homeless young people who had been placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. These included:

- Single young people of either gender
- Care leavers
- A young mum with three children (housed in B&B for over one month)

There appears to be geographical concentrations of the use of B&B. Some places, such as Whitley Bay, appear frequently in young peoples' accounts of being placed in B&B. As with hostels some of these B&B's become known for housing young vulnerable people and develop reputations amongst young people and workers.

Young women in particular described some of the fear they felt when placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. In particular they worried about who else was in the accommodation and how safe they were.

Often the bed and breakfast accommodation was far away from where they live with the increased stress and cost of having to travel far to get local authority support.

Nightstop

Nightstop was viewed favourably by most young people who had experienced it. However, where they needed to be looked after by Nightstop for several nights, the regular moving round with belongings at a time when their personal resources were low could be experienced as stressful by young people.

Furthermore, young people can be very territorial and reluctant to move out of their area for a night or two.

A worker explained:

Some young people are not interested in Nightstop because it's for only a night and they think they might as well sleep on a mate's floor in a familiar area rather than move out of their comfort zone. Nightstop hosts might be some distance from where the young person lives and involve significant travel.

Findings

One young woman who needed support in securing accommodation and was accommodated by Nightstop commented favourably about the hosts and the quality of the accommodation, however pointed out that she had to be out of the accommodation by 9.00am with nowhere to go. She suggested

It should be possible to stay for longer periods somewhere whilst longer term accommodation is being sorted.

This is not a criticism of Nightstop per se and reflects more its remit and availability in certain areas and the role and expectations of the host volunteers who volunteer to offer one-off overnight stays rather than longer term accommodation.

Part of the difficulty of moving young people on from Nightstop (which can account for the need to move young people around a number of hosts to keep them housed) comes from the delay in sorting out, for example, housing benefit. It's not possible to move young people into some forms of accommodation unless housing benefit is sorted first. This means that some young people have to continue to move between hosts or live rough until this is sorted. When it is finally resolved often the place that was originally available has gone and been allocated to others. Finding secure accommodation can take up to three months.

One young man commented on his positive experience of Nightstop:

The drop in centre referred me to Nightstop – who pretty much got in touch with me straight away and found temporary housing for me. So helpful – taking me to where I was going – because I did not know the area very well and I was in a bit of a state. Gave me lifts – whatever – useful practical help – the support I actually needed to help me get back on my feet.

Another young man described the benefits he had got from Nightstop:

I needed people to talk to – people who will listen – Nightstop covers all of that – all of the people are amazingly friendly and want to help. Giving me chance – breathing space – time to get myself together.

A young woman told of how helpful Nightstop had been for her and why:

Nightstop was an entire world different to what the Council gave me (very little help). I felt that the Council were just trying to side step me.

The staff at Nightstop and the drop-in centre were so easy to talk to and accessible – all friendly – could understand my situation – they wanted to help – I didn't have to push – they were not trying to get rid of me like the council. They did not just focus on accommodation – there was other stuff I needed help with.

Nightstop is not open to all homeless young people. Figures for the first six months of 2010 for Nightstop North East show that, of 125 young people referred, 71 were accepted and 56 (49%) were offered accommodation. A significant number, therefore, are not offered accommodation (e.g. because of their particular history of offending behaviour) and others become disqualified from Nightstop after breaking Nightstop rules when placed with hosts.

Supported Lodgings

Supported Lodgings was also viewed favourably by those young people who were housed there. Schemes vary according to funding criteria. For example, some focus solely on care leavers or 16/17 year olds.

In one scheme young people were introduced to the service through Nightstop where they got a taste of living with a family.

A focus group of young people living in supported lodgings described what they saw as the ideal lodgings provider which included:

- being honest and reliable
- supportive
- non-discriminatory (in particular “gay friendly”)
- friendly
- flexible

They also described what the lodgings providers home should be like – a safe and secure environment where their privacy and dignity were maintained. The young people also said that they would want to be included within the family and within family life. One young person described how

I always feel secure and safe within the family home where I live and I feel like a part of the family. This has really helped me settle and focus on training.

Some of the young people described how they remain close to their lodgings providers after moving on to independence. They said that this helped a lot as they did not feel alone.

A young man who had experienced a range of homeless accommodation was able to compare his current supported lodgings with other accommodation he had lived in:

I get a lot more support here – feel part of a family – no negative influences here. In the hostels I was scared of violence – it was unpredictable – the affect of drugs is unpredictable – worried that it would kick off at any time – I was anxious a lot of the time – but here I can relax – I sleep much better – I m not as stressed like I was before.

Workers pointed out that currently in some schemes, matching can be a challenge because of the small size of some of the schemes and the relatively small number of available hosts.

Poverty and “getting by”

Compounding the range of problems affecting homeless young people is the incessant impact of poverty. (Stephens, 2002)

One worker emphasised how central the issue of poverty is:

We should not under estimate how much living in poverty preoccupies young people – “How am I going to afford this that and the other? What will happen if I can’t afford to pay the electric etc” It’s a constant pre occupation.

Recent work for The Joseph Rowntree Foundation suggests that a single person requires £175.34 a week (excluding rent) to achieve a socially accepted standard of living (Hirsch et al, 2010).

Unemployed homeless young people aged 16-25 will, in the main, be in receipt of Job Seeker Allowance (JSA) or income support. The current JSA rate for a single person is £51.85.

One young man put some of his feelings into his rap music:

Money is everywhere but not in my pocket

The significant gap between young peoples’ income and what they need has a number of outcomes including debt and “getting by”.

A worker discussed poverty and debt:

Housing benefit covers about 95% of the rent (in Social Housing sector) / 18 – 25. But once everything is paid - outcomes exceed income – I have not worked with anyone yet who has not got debt – I have not got anyone on my case load who has not got debt – the outgoings that independent living demands (I’m not talking about luxuries here) – I don’t know how young people afford these – but they tend to in all sorts of ways. It’s a hand to mouth existence. They develop all sorts of scams to get by – yet they always seem to have money to buy drugs and alcohol which further compounds the problem of debt...

£51.85 is not enough to live on when you look at socially excluded young people. For those who stay at home it is enough because of the safety net of home. The system is built around young people who live at home.

One young man described how, like others, he used the crisis loan system to keep his head above water.

If I didn’t have money I would ring the crisis people with any old excuse to get a crisis loan – appear vulnerable on the phone – know what to say that would achieve a further loan. Anyone can come up with an excuse like “I’ve lost my money” – they should ask more questions – it doesn’t really help in the end. I was using the money to live off rather than helping with a temporary crisis.

May take three years to pay back the loan and what happens is I keep getting top ups – so it never gets paid off. I remember at one time owing them £1000 – I was paying back £20 per week and because I had brought the loan down I was able to borrow some more.

Findings

Young people talked about a range of methods they used “to get by” (i.e. deal with the situations they were in, which included living in poverty). These included:

- Hustling / Prostitution
- Drug running
- Money laundering
- “Body bartering” (making relationships in return for a roof over one’s head)

One young man commented:

I’ve got no job and little hope – what’s in this for me? It’s easier making money from drugs – but then I know I’m also in a dangerous situation – and having to be hard and be someone that I’m not – it hardens me.

One young man with rent arrears for a previous property explained that money was being deducted from his JSA to pay off some of these arrears.

I got into debt and then have to pay back through benefits – I can be left with only £30 JSA per week – how can I live on that?

A hostel worker commented:

One young person here is left with £6 per week for food after they have paid for all essentials and something for their debts. This results in young people relying on handouts from friends / family / charities. This can also result in young people making money in whatever way that they can particularly as most don’t have any family to help them out.

Workers who have been involved in this project have expressed their deep frustration at their lack of ability to impact on this key aspect of young peoples’ lives.

A worker commented:

I’m expected to teach budgeting skills – yet how can I teach young people to do the impossible – live on £51 per week? These are young people who, in the main, do not have other supports available to them such as family support. Is it any wonder they develop other ways to get money?

The Benefits System

The benefits system can act as a barrier to young people exiting homelessness and poverty in the following ways.

Housing Benefit

If a young person is living in a hostel and starts work they immediately become liable for the full rent (including the support element) this can range between £90 – over £200 per week and much more in some hostels. This results in either the young person having to move on at the same time as starting work (another unplanned transition at a time when stability is needed to enable them to go to work) or in some cases accruing rent arrears which can then lead to eviction. The fact that this can happen also results in a lot of young people deciding that work is not a viable alternative and do not seek it.

They moved me to the hostel – I was there for six months. I was working and had to pay £95 there. I was still £300 in arrears when I left there - it was just too hard to keep up the payments. I tried to get a pay rise but couldn't - I was stuck (Young man).

One young man described how, because he was working, he could not access various activities in the hostel which were funded for unemployed young people:

Another thing I would criticise would be – there are loads of things advertised in the hallway – boxing / white water rafting / climbing – I'd love all of that. I applied for it and was told that I couldn't do it because I was working! You are not eligible. I said – hang on a bit – I'm paying for these to go (through my taxes) but I can't go.

Some workers have commented that they discourage young people from working because of the negative impact that it can have on their income and accommodation.

We tell young people not to get a job because of benefits issue. They can't afford to pay what they are asked to and have to leave – sometimes with debt and therefore could be deemed intentionally homeless. They end up no better off than young people who don't work (Hostel Worker)

One young man in a hostel who tried to look for work said:

My social worker tried to help me find a job but he said the rent would be £180 per week excluding food. Which made me think “What was the point in working as I'd have nothing left?”

A young man (a care leaver) explained the consequences for him of working:

I was evicted because I built up rent arrears when I started work. I told the staff at the Housing Department that I was being evicted from the hostel and needed somewhere to stay or I was going to be on the streets they filled in a form to go on the council register but told me they couldn't process it until they got a reference from the hostel. The hostel said they would not give me a reference until I paid at least half of my rent arrears of around £1000.

I don't know what steps to take to get my own place. I've been paying back the hostel in instalments but I don't know how long it'll take to pay enough for them to give me a reference. Even then I don't see the point as even if I get on the council list I'll be waiting forever for my own place as I am not a priority.

It also impacts on the range of accommodation open to young people who are homeless but also working. Most hostel type accommodation is out of their reach because of the cost. One worker who was trying to get a homeless young person accommodated in a hostel described just such an example:

The hostel option has not come to anything because it doesn't work out financially with him working - he's clearly trying too hard to do things for himself!!

The above also applies to a lesser extent to single homeless young people living in lodgings or property on their own (in particular in the private sector). Part time work / low paid work is often the only option for them and the loss of housing benefit when they start work acts as a disincentive to work seeking. The increased availability of part time work which accounts in large part for the recent increase in employment (ONS, May 2010) is of little help to this group of young people.

Local Housing Allowance

Single young people aged under 25 years are restricted to £60 per week Local Housing Allowance (LHA) for renting property in the private sector. This places significant restrictions on the type and availability of accommodation available to them.

Changes to the payment of Local Housing Allowance to tenants in the private sector have meant that the assumption is made that LHA will be paid direct to the tenant (who is then expected to pay the landlord). LHA can be paid direct to the landlord in exceptional cases (for example after a period of non-payment of rent which the landlord is expected to stand).

Findings

This has had a number of consequences:

- i) Anecdotally there has been a reduction in the availability of accommodation in the private rented sector. This is difficult to quantify and is based on the practice experience of front line workers.
- ii) For some young people, having £120 paid into their bank every two weeks has proved to be too big a temptation. They have used this to pay for other demands resulting in rent arrears and subsequent eviction.
- iii) Where young people run up overdrafts on bank accounts and have to pay bank charges these charges are deducted from any money paid into the account (including LHA) leaving a short fall in the rent and subsequent rent arrears.

The rationale for LHA is that it fosters responsibility and increases choice by creating a market where people can use their LHA to “shop around” for accommodation. However, it places a responsibility on some young people who are far from ready to shoulder this. It assumes the ability to plan and defer gratification by often chaotic young people struggling to deal with their homeless situation living in poverty and subject to the temptation to “rob Peter to pay Paul”.

It's become yet something else that we have to deal with and troubleshoot for
(Support Worker)

Shelter's research has found that this system has contributed to more than a quarter of claimants falling behind on their rent payments.

The majority of claimants who had experience of both payment methods said they would prefer to have the money paid directly to the landlord.

Evidence from landlords also shows that a growing number are refusing to let to LHA claimants because of rent arrears due to the new payment method.

Shelter's research shows 60% of respondents found it difficult to find landlords who are willing to let to them as LHA claimants. (Frost et al, 2009)

Accessing Further Education

The ways to access full time Further Education courses after aged 20 (when Income Support for estranged young people ceases) are severely limited. Some young people sign up for part time courses (under 16 hours per week). Some young people knowingly take a risk and sign on for full time courses whilst still claiming JSA. Both groups run the risk of having to accept a full time job if this becomes available and thereby having to withdraw from their course.

One worker said:

Income Support recognises the needs of estranged young people up to aged 20 – what about afterwards – the needs are the same after 20 – why can't young people in these situations continue to claim Income Support if they can prove they are in full time education?

Findings

Another young man wanted to attend college full time by trying to live on Adult Learning Grant (ALG) whilst renting a room and queried if he would still be allowed to claim Local Housing Allowance. The reply from the Housing Benefit section was:

If the young person continued to be in receipt of Job Seekers Allowance he is eligible to claim Housing Benefit. However, if he is a single person and a full time student claiming ALG, he would not be eligible to claim Housing Benefit. The only way he can claim Housing Benefit is to have a dependant child or a disability.

Job Seeker Allowance

Currently 25 year old people are paid £13.60 more than 16-24 year olds.

Workers and young people many times questioned the rationale for the different rates of Job Seeker Allowance for single young people arguing that the costs of living for single people living on their own is the same whether or not they are 16 or 25.

One young man commented:

JSA levels do not make sense for different rates of pay according to age! 16 year olds have the same running costs as 25 year olds – cost of electric doesn't go up or costs of food – these are the same whether 16 or 25 – young people may need more to help them engage in education / training. Differences in benefits should be looked at for single homeless who have the same needs whatever their age.

The Quality of Support Workers

The variability in staff skills and attitudes was a strong theme in young peoples stories and raises the question of how this variability in quality can be reduced.

I had mixed experiences with being in supported accommodation, this was due to a mixture of staff and residents. I felt that some of the staff had different communication skills which made it hard to relate to us as people. A couple of the staff members were friendlier making it an equal balance. In the end I now have my own independence after being resettled (Young man)

At its least effective, young people talk of being let down by workers who break promises and miss appointments. This leads them to become disillusioned and losing confidence in services.

I never know when my support worker is coming – I go weeks without seeing them and then out of the blue they ring to say they are coming – I'm not sure why.

Findings

A young man said:

I have an issue at my hostel in relation to the staff not listening to the suggestions that we come up with. I find it frustrating and what's the point if nothing is done when you bring up good ideas. They want us to be involved but don't listen to us.

Young people value high quality support – “people sticking by young people and not giving up on them”. An example of this was given by a support worker.

There are some young people who I have assessed and said that they are not ready to be helped. Sometimes people have to be on the bottom and have nowhere else to go before they are open to help of some kind. There may then be a turning point event – significant event of some kind that prompts openness to help (e.g. parenthood etc). There was one young woman who was not engaging and I happened to be looking through my diary and noticed that it was her birthday so sent her a card saying to contact me if she required any further help. She did get back to me to thank me for the card and to ask for help. It's important to stay in contact some how and to be watchful for possible opportunities / events and capitalise on these – need to be tenacious and follow a crisis intervention model – maximising opportunities for change at a time of crisis.

This worker was describing both her tenacity and how her work was underpinned by a clear model of crisis intervention.

A brother and sister who had both been looked after by the Local Authority (and were now Care Leavers) and who had both experienced homelessness were able to compare their respective social workers.

The sister commented:

Me and Peter had a very long chat about the difference between how my life's been since leaving care and his. We think it's a lot to do with our different relationships with our social workers from The Leaving care team. I had a great relationship with mine and felt she was always there for me and would always do everything to help me. Peter said his relationship was different, he said maybe it was because it was a man and because of pride he wouldn't let him know his feelings 'n stuff. Whereas if he had been a female worker he might have opened up more and built up a better relationship and got more help from her.

We then got onto the support I have had since I moved to X and started accessing the drop-in centre. Peter wishes there was a similar project in the west end where he stays (he is sofa surfing) as he knows he would be able to get help and support.

Findings

Another young woman said:

Social workers are always changing – I get fed up of repeating the same story over and over. Just get close and they leave – why get close – I can never get to trust any of them. But one of them did take an interest and kept contacting me to find out how I was. She was always there for me and she was the one who persuaded me to leave the dangerous situation I was in – none of the others seemed to see what I had to deal with and that I was in danger. She got me into the refuge.

She was always there for me and did what she said she would do – she rang to check if I was Ok – none of the others had done that – I started to think that “someone cares about me” – my family had given up on me.

Another young man described what he valued in his support worker:

Another thing was the support from my resettlement worker. I actually lost it a couple of times and said that I was not going to work and she said “You’ve got to stay focussed and keep doing it – you’ll soon get your flat and be out of here...[i.e. the hostel]”

That kept me going – She was a role model – it wasn’t somebody banging onto us it was someone that I wanted to impress.

A young woman was able to compare two workers she had in a hostel:

One worker – I could tell she really believed in me and was always seeking me out – didn’t just wait for me to go to her - I wanted to impress her and do right by her – she believed in me.

The other worker – she seemed – she just seemed concerned about rules and regulations – signing forms and stuff like that – she didn’t seem to care about my point of view and what I had to say. She seemed to criticise everything I did – I didn’t seem to be able to do anything right for her. You don’t need that at that point in time!

A young man attending a drop in centre commented:

The staff made me feel that I can be me!! I got certificates – I wish that I had this years ago – if I had had this at 16 it could have changed my life – I like it here because people listen and treat me as an equal. I now know that I can do more with my life! The staff believe in me and have given me a lot of support.

One young man talked of his need to discuss how he had become homeless:

No-one was dealing with my emotions and feelings that I had from leaving home. I couldn’t get the thoughts out of my head and it was like they drowned out anything else. I wasn’t able to talk to my worker about these – he always seemed in a rush and sometimes when we met it just didn’t feel right.

The implication of this is that the work with homeless young people has to be intensive and skilful. This has resource implications, which includes the training and the pay and conditions of employment of support staff.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this project the following recommendations are made.

Safeguard homeless young people

Other studies have also highlighted what young people have told us during this research project - that safety is the number one priority for young people, and the type of provision is less important.

The young people who were surveyedassessed the suitability of temporary housing using different criteria to adult practitioners and stakeholders. They placed significantly greater emphasis on safety and cleanliness and less emphasis on the nature of the provision. The role of staff in enforcing rules which made young people feel safe was seen as important and positive (Arnull et al, 2007)

The aim of any service system should be, at the very least, to keep vulnerable young people as safe as possible and not place them in situations where there is a probability of further harm. Service responses should not increase stress with its consequent effect on behaviour.

There is also an ethical dimension here with many groups of workers having codes of ethics / conduct with duties to:

- Promote the independence of service users whilst protecting them as far as possible from danger or harm.
- Respect and maintain the dignity and privacy of service users (GSCC Codes of Practice for Social Workers)

Workers subject to this code of practice will have an ethical duty to speak out about the quality of services offered to these young people especially where young peoples' safety is such a key issue.

A counsellor working with abused young people commented:

The first aim of any system should be to keep vulnerable young people safe, reduce both external and internal chaos of the young people, provide structure and stability and address young peoples' emotional and practical needs.

From our research and consultation the safest and most popular types of accommodation appear to be Night Stop and Supported Lodgings followed by independent living with support.

The findings from this project would suggest that the hostel approach to caring for vulnerable homeless 16-25 year old young people should be critically questioned.

Recommendations

The use of hostel accommodation should be reduced and the availability of other forms of safer accommodation such as Night Stop, Supported Lodgings and “Crash Pads” increased. Preliminary cost data suggests that Supported Lodgings cost 1/3 of a hostel place with better outcomes (See Appendix 4).

The rationale for hostel accommodation should be explored. Where it is believed that hostel accommodation is the most effective answer to particular groups of young peoples’ needs then good practice from the child care field could be used as a template for developing hostel accommodation for 16-25 year olds. This would imply smaller hostels underpinned with a clearly articulated, evidence informed, theory of change. It would also imply higher staffing levels than currently exist.

In particular, it is suggested that 16/17 year old young people should expect the same standard required of in-house services wherever they are placed by Children’s Services.

We have started to share the findings from this research with one Local Authority to explore the link between some of the findings in relation to safety and Protection of Vulnerable Adult (POVA) guidelines. This is being progressed to identify what part the POVA guidelines and the Local Authority’s general Duty of Care might play in ensuring young peoples’ safety.

Adopt a Human Rights Approach to safeguarding young people

Studies such as this frequently argue for change from a needs perspective. However, another approach is to argue for change from a human rights perspective

All persons have the right to live their lives free from abuse and violence. This right is underpinned by the duty on public agencies under the Human Rights Act (1998). This would imply that any adult at risk of abuse or neglect should be able to access public organisations for appropriate support / interventions to stop abuse or neglect. This is a right not something to be plead for. Those who fund the current system of service provision should actively explore the impact of the current service provision on young people and the extent to which they are exercising their duty of care towards young people and safeguarding their human rights.

During the course of this project we have linked up with the British Institute of Human Rights and will continue to pursue the Human Rights approach to addressing homelessness and how this might be used in individual advocacy and service development.

Listen to Young People

Listening can be a powerful tool to enhance the safety of young people by giving them the opportunity to talk about their concerns. Clearly such consultations should be structured to maximise the possibility of open communication without fear of, for example, eviction, withdrawal of service, loss of confidentiality etc.

The learning from this project has been that the project work with small groups of young people has yielded significantly more fruitful data than the one-off case studies. As trust and confidence developed and opportunities given, young people felt able to share experiences they were not able to talk about earlier in the project (See Data Collection above). The dialogue between research workers and young people has helped raise their awareness and understanding of the situations they are in, thus developing a greater critical awareness of these situations.

One worker commented to two young people who had become peer researchers:

Politicians will not have clue – your stories are the most powerful thing – you need to tell them your stories – and hold them to it by following this up – asking them what has happened – what have you done.

Young people involved in this project have offered invaluable insights into their predicaments. They have described what does and does not help and described, graphically at times, their experiences of the services currently available to them.

The inclusion of young people in various aspects of this project has empowered them and demonstrated how aspirations can be raised when young people initiated projects are combined with appropriate levels of support and incentives.

This approach has also facilitated the civic re-engagement of some of these socially excluded young people through the various influencing activities.

Reflecting on the benefits of discussing politics with socially excluded young people a worker commented:

If they are aware then, with help, they can challenge the system – see who has the power and how they can challenge that power. This awareness means that anger can be channelled appropriately through positive activities – knowledge is power – they can also learn new skills – advocacy, communication, interpersonal skills etc.

Recommendations

Young people have been at the heart of this project. A number of opportunities have been created for young people to influence decision makers and develop their skills through:

- i) Contributing their experiences during data capture
- ii) DVD / film making of their experiences with ITV Fixers
- iii) Organising a Film Festival to publicise their film
- iv) Peer mentoring
- v) Becoming peer researchers and part of the research team
- vi) Contributing to a range of influencing activities (See Appendix 3)

Any participation strategy should have effective feedback loops built in to inform young people about what has happened to their suggestions (Hear by Right, National Youth Agency). This is not easy with transient groups such as homeless young people. However, by feeding back through, for example, support workers and the use of other methods, such as text messaging, it is possible to feed back to many of the young people who have contributed their experiences.

It is important to add also “Listen to Workers” and give them safe space also to voice their views on service delivery!

Ensure that services for homeless young people are based on an understanding of their needs

An understanding of the psychological state of homelessness is a key starting point for supporting young homeless people and designing a youth homelessness service system (see Policy and Research Background above).

Homelessness can activate or compound a whole range of mental health problems relating to earlier childhood / adolescent experiences. This, in turn, will influence their ability to deal with the homeless system which, at times requires high levels of resilience to navigate.

Such an approach would also recognise that young people aged 16-25 are still developing physically, emotionally and psychologically and open to interventions that seek to address previous traumas. For many young people late development is likely to be the result of the cumulative effect of various traumas in their lives.

Ready or Not (Research, commissioned by youth charity Catch 22) suggests that young people reach adulthood at different speeds and at different times, and that many need continued help and support with various issues in their lives beyond the age when it might normally be offered. It calls on the government to formally recognise young adulthood, from 16 to 25, as a specific life stage and ensure services are better coordinated and more relevant to young people struggling to make the transition to adulthood (Catch 22, 2009)

Adopt a Holistic Approach

The importance of holistic working is highlighted by Stein, M et al, 2009, who undertook a systematic review of the research literature on how services respond to neglect of adolescents. They comment:

In general [this review] tends to support an ecological or multi-systemic approach to interventions which fits well with the Assessment Framework and also the evidence on background factors of child neglect discussed earlier
(Stein, M et al, 2009)

Such an approach would ensure that homelessness was not purely defined by the need to provide safe accommodation but also included the need to address a whole range of factors that the research literature suggests is equally, if not more, relevant.

This, in turn, would imply a greater emphasis on multi-disciplinary working and greater involvement of mental health services in the assessment and support of homeless young people.

One service helping young people move into training and/or employment described how they had access to a clinical psychologist to encourage more appropriate responses to clients needs thus recognising emotional and psychological barriers to employment.

Reduce the stress on young people at the point of crisis

Young people have indicated that the current system can accentuate the chaos they are in rather than reduce it.

A key aim should be to reduce the stress on young people at the point of becoming homeless. For many young people in this study the current system increased the stress on them with a tendency for headless chicken behaviour or else for the building of spurious and unhelpful defences which can include avoiding offers of support.

At a point of significant crisis (i.e. homelessness) vulnerable young people are expected to navigate a complex system which, at times, workers themselves find challenging.

The provision of “one-stop shops” which adopt a holistic approach, assertive outreach and strong advocacy would greatly simplify the system and minimise many of the current challenges it presents to young people.

This would recognise the psychological and emotional impact of homelessness outlined earlier in this report and the diminished resilience of young people at this time.

Undertake a more detailed analysis of the how the benefits system impacts on homeless young people and their ability to escape poverty

This project has identified issues relating to the benefits system that act as barriers to young people exiting poverty and homelessness. Some of these are already subject to campaigning by various organisations (e.g. Shelter is campaigning on the impact of Local Housing Allowance on the availability of private rented accommodation). Prior to this year's General Election this project also contributed to a Department of Works and Pensions consultation on the various "benefit traps" that can act as barriers to getting into work.

One cost neutral change would be to make it possible for this group of young people to continue to be eligible for Income Support (IS), in certain circumstances, up to their 25th birthday. This would recognise the fact that young people do develop at different rates and that disadvantaged young people may need more time and effort to re-engage with training and education than other groups. This would enable the young person to be able, for example, to attend full time Further Education Courses. Homeless young people could also be eligible for Income support for short periods at a time of crisis to take them out of Job Seeking / signing on and thus reducing one source of stress whilst their needs are being assessed and a support plan is being put into place.

Receipt of IS during this extended period up to their 25th birthday would be linked to agreed aims forming part of a care plan.

In respect of housing benefit, transitional arrangements should be made to enable young people in hostels to start work and not immediately have to pay the full amount for their accommodation. For example, the full amount could be phased in over a period of time or deferred entirely for a period of time to enable any necessary "move on" to happen in a planned way.

Consider the impact of Poverty

Any intervention needs to take into account the current and previous impacts of poverty on the young person and of how this impacts on their ability to sustain accommodation of various kinds.

Training and work can be one way out of this situation, however, histories of missed education and the impact of neglect and homelessness on cognitive and emotional abilities can present considerable challenges to engagement in training, education and employment.

Add to this the disincentive to work for those living in accommodation funded by Supporting People, the lack of job opportunities, the various "benefit traps" for people working on low incomes and the challenges to addressing poverty for this group of young people become very significant.

Apply clear standards to the quality of support to young people

The comments made by young people suggest the characteristics of workers that they most value:

- Reliability
- Commitment
- “Going the extra mile”
- Good listener
- Accessibility

The quality of support workers should not be left to chance. It is fully recognised that this is linked to service pay and conditions and the training of support staff.

Criteria for support services to young people already exist that could be used as standards against which to evaluate services. For example, You're Welcome quality criteria sets out principles that will help health services (including non- NHS provision) become young people friendly and could be adapted for this purpose.

In particular these criteria include the following:

All staff who are likely to come into contact with young people receive basic training on communicating easily with young people, promoting attitudes and values that are young people friendly, and meeting standards established in the current NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework. Staff also receive training on working to current Department of Health guidance on confidentiality and consent and seeing young people on their own. (DoH, 2007, page 6).

Similarly, there is a whole range of Department of Health National Minimum Standards and Regulations relating to placements of younger adults which have developed out of good practice and would be equally relevant to services for homeless young people.

Challenge the usefulness of current legal definitions and categorisations of homeless young people

Much time and effort is taken at present assessing whether or not a young person is, for example, intentionally homeless or priority or non-priority need. In reality young people and workers will emphasise that such distinctions are meaningless and that all young people who are homeless are vulnerable and in need.

More work needs to be done to explore what happens to those young people who fall into the categories of “Intentionally homeless” and “Non-priority” and what support they receive and how they access this.

Recommendations

It is note worthy that there has been country-specific developments relevant to youth homelessness. In Scotland, for example, there are plans for providing permanent re-housing to all homeless households by 2012 and 'Priority need' is to be extended in stages, so that by 2012 there will be no distinction between different priority groups of homeless people. (Quilars et al, 2008)

Given the background of many young homeless people (see Literature Review above) "their needs will be significant and leave them vulnerable way beyond officially recognised categories of priority need etc" (Ready or Not, 2009)

Ensure that services are evidence informed

Interventions should be evidence informed and services developed from the current best available research evidence. As a minimum there should be a theory of change which is reflected in, for example, appropriate staffing and skill levels and, where relevant, the size of hostels. These theories should take into account the particular development needs of homeless young people and what is known about, for example, group dynamics where young people are placed in group living.

For example, research suggests in relation to groups that one dynamic is that of the "Risky Shift" / group polarization phenomenon. When people are in groups, they make decision about risk differently from when they are alone. In the group, they are likely to make riskier decisions, as the shared risk makes the individual risk less. They also may not want to let their friends down, and hence be risk averse (this is sometimes called *cautious shift*). What are the implications of this for the staffing of the group living accommodation that we place young people in? How many staff, with what skills does it need to work with this group dynamic?

The heterogeneous nature of hostel accommodation was described above. Young people can find themselves placed in a whole variety of hostel accommodation. One would assume that, were there to be an evidence informed, commonly agreed, effective way to house young people, then hostels would look much more similar than they actually do i.e. there would be convergence of size, structure, staffing etc.

Funding would be allocated according to best available evidence about "What works". This would include further work to explore the relative costs and benefits of various forms of accommodation to inform decisions about the allocation of scarce resources. For example, what are the relative costs and benefits of supported lodgings and hostel placements?

Currently available data would suggest that the benefits of supported lodgings, for example, out weigh those of hostel accommodation at a third of the cost. (see Appendix 4)

We were able to obtain projected Supporting People spending figures from only one Local Authority for 2010-2011. It appeared that funding for Supported Lodgings in this Authority accounted for 4% of total spend for 16-25 year olds. This would appear to be at variance with what young people said about the effectiveness of various types of accommodation and suggest that within current budgets it would be possible to increase benefits with the same amount of funding by moving funds from less to more effective services.

Suggestions for Service Development

Based on the interviews we have conducted with young people and workers the main components of a youth homelessness system would include:

- Each local authority would have a well publicised “One-stop” walk-in service where vulnerable young people could access a range of multiagency practical and emotional support through one key worker. Such a service would operate flexible extended hours including weekends. This could be complemented by a 24 hour emergency telephone help line. This would be developed according to the geographical nature of the Local Authority.
- Holistic assessments would be undertaken from a multi-agency / multidisciplinary perspective – initiated and progressed through one key worker. Interventions would be evidence informed and underpinned by a therapeutic approach and recognise the range of social, emotional and psychological issues both leading up to and resulting from homelessness.
- Safe, emergency accommodation such as Night Stop would be available for those young people whose situation can be sorted fairly quickly.
- For those young people with more complex needs “Crash pads” would be developed i.e. short term emergency supported lodgings where young people could stay for a short period whilst their needs are being assessed and a plan agreed. This would be for young people whose situation will take more than a few days to sort out.
- A range of flexible, safe, move-on accommodation such as Supported Lodgings or small well-staffed specialised hostel accommodation would be developed. This would involve an expansion of Supported Lodgings to mirror the current range of foster care provision to address the emotional needs of these vulnerable young people (some of whom will have been in Local Authority Care only a short time before). Such provision could range from lodgings up to more therapeutic placements. As with foster care, the continuum of supported lodgings placements would attract different levels of payment and training according to the degree of skills required.
- An exploration of the part that a more flexible use of Income Support could play in the process of resilience building for homeless 16-25 year olds.
- Agreeing transitional arrangements for the payment of Housing Benefit when a young person in a hostel starts work.
- An exploration of the possibilities for joint commissioning of work across local authorities. Is it realistic or cost effective for each Local Authority to have the full range of provision for homeless young people? What part might joint commissioning of specialist regional services play (e.g. small well-staffed units to meet the specialist needs of young people with high levels of need or emergency crisis accommodation)

Suggestions for Service Development

- All homeless young people aged 16-25 to be assessed as priority need. The focus would then be on helping rather than categorising them. This would also recognise that young peoples' progress is not linear and that they will continue to need safety nets as progress comes through trial and error. This would imply a more flexible application of current homelessness criteria.
- Placing high quality support at the heart of service delivery. For example, by identifying and applying quality standards to the work of staff employed to work with homeless young people.
- Implement effective participation strategies to learn from young peoples' experiences of services and to enable them to voice concerns they may have, for example, about their safety.

Some of the elements of this service structure can be found in Table 1.



Conclusion

It cannot be claimed that this project has captured a complete picture of youth homelessness in Tyne and Wear and Northumberland. The data represents pieces of a jig saw. At its most conservative it could be that the issues identified may apply solely to those young people who have been involved in this project.

Even if this were true they would still need addressing.

However, given the consistency of themes and the fact that some of the issues will inevitably be national ones (e.g. benefit rates, poverty, housing benefit rules, definitions of priority need, use of hostel accommodation etc) and are consistent with other research findings the issues are likely to apply to a much wider group of homeless young people.

Young homeless people are likely to have reduced resilience by virtue of their family backgrounds. Becoming homeless can reduce this resilience even further. They are then expected to negotiate a complex, at times disjointed, system, often on their own with little support.

Additionally, they are all living in poverty, socially excluded, with weak support networks and very vulnerable to even the slightest setbacks.

The system which is meant to help them will often then place them in situations and cultures of negativity and hopelessness which further places them at risk of a range of harms. The outcome of this can be that they (the young people), because of their behaviour, are seen as the “problem” when what is being seen is their reaction to the environment and cultures in which they have been placed.

How can we keep vulnerable young people safer than at present and develop services that match the needs of some of the most vulnerable young people in our society in a climate of financial restraint?

This study has suggested a number of service developments. Some of these could provide more benefit with the same level of funding (e.g. moving funds from hostel to supported lodgings accommodation), some would be cost neutral (e.g. more flexible use of Income Support at times of crisis and to enable wider access to further education for late developers).

This could be viewed as an investment to prevent greater costs resulting from criminal behaviour, extra demands on health services and a range of future welfare costs when these young people become parents themselves still dealing with unaddressed traumas from their earlier lives which have been added to through their experiences of homelessness.

Table 1
Summary of elements of the intervention at different stages of youth homelessness

Stage	Elements of the Intervention
The point of becoming homeless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Engage the young person through intensive assertive outreach ● Deal with the immediate crisis and prevent things from getting worse ● Reduce stressors on young person ● Address a range of issues through one service point (i.e. “One stop shops”) which provides a nurturing environment ● Strong Advocacy on behalf of the young person ● Provision of safe accommodation ● Address the social / psychological and emotional needs of the young person through holistic multi-agency assessments and start to build resilience ● Intervention plan directed by the young person ● Services would meet a recognised standard for being young person friendly
Move on from crisis accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resilience building (addressing social capital factors such as networks of family and friends, participation in clubs and groups are strongly linked with emotional wellbeing) ● Provision of more permanent safe accommodation ● Engage young person in training / skill development (through, for example, volunteering work) ● Work on specific issues identified through holistic assessment ● Encouraging young person to start to take on more responsibility for their development plan ● Gradual reduction in assertive outreach ● Peer mentoring ● Developing budgeting skills
Move onto more permanent safe accommodation (e.g. Local authority housing/private sector housing, supported lodgings)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Young person takes on primary responsibility for their development plan ● Continue the process of resilience building (e.g. engagement in training / skill development) ● Continue to work on specific issues identified through holistic assessment ● Continue development of pro-social support networks ● Continue development of budgeting skills ● Reduce outreach work ● Peer mentoring ● Continue to offer a safety net and recognise that progress is not linear and young people will continue to need safety nets as progress comes through trial and error!

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Appendix 1

Criteria for Priority Need (Housing Act 1996)

- Responsible for a child or children
- Pregnant or with a pregnant partner
- Homeless as a result of a disaster
- Disabled or having physical or mental health problems
- Vulnerable due to risk of violence, sexual abuse, alcohol/drug use or prostitution
- Judged to be vulnerable after leaving the armed forces, a young offenders institute or prison
- 16 or 17 - unless you are the responsibility of Social Services (Children's Social Care)
- 18-21 and have had past involvement with Social Services (Children's Social Care)



Appendix 2

PEANuT (Based in Northumbria University)

What is participatory appraisal?

Participatory appraisal is a community-based approach to consultation that gives precedence to the views and attitudes of local people as experts within their own communities. Through PA, local people can explore and share their knowledge of life and local conditions as well make decisions, and plan and carry out actions to effect change within their communities. The PA approach transcends more conventional research methods by using visual and flexible tools such as maps, spider diagrams and charts. The process is interactive rather than extractive, enabling people from all backgrounds and with varying abilities to be involved in the research, education and collective action.

How does PA work?

PA comprises of 3 elements; research, education and collective action. Research is carried out by members of the community on issues they have identified as relevant to them. Collective education follows as the participants learn as they collect, contribute and disseminate information. The participatory nature of this approach also enables respondents to be more involved with decision-making processes by contributing their knowledge of local needs and taking ownership of the ideas and solutions that are forthcoming. The wider community can begin to gain a sense of empowerment through collective action and the experiences of having their views taken seriously and acted upon.

Where did PA come from and how can it be applied?

Participatory appraisal has been widely used in the southern hemisphere in the context of working with rural communities in developing countries. However, in recent years the principles of participation and action-oriented research have been increasingly drawn upon in the northern hemisphere (including the UK) to identify and find solutions to a range of issues within local communities. In the North East PA has been used to look at a wide range of issues including drugs, crime, barriers to employment, sexual health, community facilities, graffiti, financial exclusion, and education.

<http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sas/enterprise/pa/>

Appendix 3

Influencing Activities Undertaken

- 1) Meeting with a number of MP's and other decision makers in the House of Commons in December 2010 (this was organised by Barnardo's central office).
- 2) Barnardo's involvement in the North East Regional Youth Homelessness Network has helped that network secure funding from Northern Rock to employ a Policy / Strategy Officer to develop a Regional Youth Homelessness Strategy. The findings from this project will inform the development of this strategy
- 3) A group of young people met with Helen Goodman (MP). At the time she was Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Work and Pensions.
- 4) We have contributed to two Government Consultations relevant to this project namely (i) The impact of Local Housing Allowance on the provision of private accommodation for homeless young people and (ii) Identifying barriers to work created by the benefits system
- 5) We have contributed to a number of Local Authority consultation processes (e.g. Northumberland "Let's get Service Users Involved")
- 6) A submission has been made to the ANEC research into homelessness in the North East
- 7) Barnardo's Policy and Research Unit is considering what scope there might be for a national campaign on some of the issues identified so far.
- 8) Barnardo's is using the findings from this project to support funding bids for service development
- 9) A group of "Millfield" young people took part in a Radio 5 Budget special to comment on the budget as it was announced
- 10) A group of young people has worked with ITV Fixers to make a short TV programme about their experiences of homelessness. The work of this group of young people has been shown regionally on prime time TV. ITV are publicising the work of the group through their own networks / web sites.
- 11) This group organised a Film Festival event at the Star and Shadow cinema on May 13th to show case both their own DVD and two other films made by homeless young people. Key decision makers attended this event
- 12) We are currently exploring with Local Authority lead officers, the link between our findings and the Protection of Vulnerable Adults guidelines
- 13) Young people put homelessness related questions to a Panel of prospective parliamentary candidates on Radio Newcastle on Friday 16th April
- 14) Five of the young people involved in the project have sent specific questions to their prospective MP's and are awaiting responses from them.

Appendix 4

Cost benefit analysis of service provision to homeless young people

Analysis of Supporting People outcomes data for 2007-2008 suggests that:

- on most outcome indicators, a higher percentage of young people (aged 16 to 21) supported through supported lodgings achieve positive outcomes within the five Every Child Matters outcomes framework than those supported in three other types of provision; supported accommodation, floating support and Foyers,
- more than 80 per cent of young people who needed support achieved their objectives in pursuing education, and 56 per cent of those for whom it was applicable secured qualifications as a result,
- 70 per cent of young people needing support to participate in work-like activities achieved this and 53 per cent of those who needed support had paid work during their stay in supported lodgings.

(Holmes, 2008)

The author also comments that:

It would be wrong to assume that supported lodgings are most suitable for young people who present relatively few challenges or have “low levels of need” – they accommodate young people with all types of need. However, supported lodgings are not suitable for all young people, for example those with few boundaries to their behaviour or who want the freedom and anonymity of other settings (page 6)

Costs

Barnardo's has both supported lodgings schemes and hostel accommodation. Preliminary analysis of the relative costs of these services suggests that a Supported Lodgings placement (approx. £6,000 per year) costs 1/3 of a hostel place (approx £20,000 per year). More work needs to be undertaken on this to take account of differentials in risk taking and criminal behaviour and demands on health services. These are likely to be different for young people in different living situations.



Is this what you think homelessness is?
Yes?....how wrong you are....find out more....

STAR AND SHADOW CINEMA



Young and Homeless Film Festival

Presents

Young and Homeless
It's Not All Peachy
The Tramp

13th May 2010

Films Featured



Inspired and made by young people

