

# Young People, Mental Health and Wellbeing

## Learning from Homeless Link's Youth Network Events 2019

**Let's end homelessness together**

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# Young People, Mental Health and Wellbeing

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# Introduction

In September and October 2019, Homeless Link ran a series of network events across England. These events focused on young people's mental health and wellbeing and were attended by a range of professionals working with, or delivering and commissioning services for young people who are homeless.

Research shows a high proportion of young people who are homeless have mental health needs, including diagnosed psychiatric disorders, and undiagnosed needs that are either self-reported by young people, or identified by the homeless services that are supporting them.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Network attendees shared that they are seeing a higher number of young people accessing their services with support needs around their mental health. They told us that often young people's mental wellbeing is linked to experiences of early childhood trauma. The support needs of these young people had frequently been identified years prior to them accessing homelessness services, however they had received little or no intervention or support.

Identifying a variety of challenges in supporting young people, staff in accommodation projects described how they often feel like the sole person responding to and supporting these young people. Alongside this they feel pressure to 'create change' in one year, when young people's needs are varying and complex, and where they have often been in residential care for five to six years prior to entering the service. This expectation also does not reflect developmental needs and change where young people are transitioning into adulthood.

This briefing provides a summary of the learning from these events. While homelessness services cannot be the only ones supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, professionals identified a number of opportunities and actions that can be taken to better support young people.

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<sup>1</sup> Llamau (2015), Study of the Experiences of Young Homeless People (SEYHoPe) Key findings & implications 2015: [www.llamau.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3a84ee00-b19e-4007-b0a4-a2629ea344de](http://www.llamau.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3a84ee00-b19e-4007-b0a4-a2629ea344de)

<sup>2</sup> Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: [www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research](http://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research)

<sup>3</sup> [www.yhne.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Mental-Health-Project-Final-Report-April-2019-.pdf](http://www.yhne.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Mental-Health-Project-Final-Report-April-2019-.pdf)

## Responding to young people's mental health and wellbeing needs in homelessness services

### Identifying needs

The amount of information an organisation has access to when a young person comes into contact with their service can vary, and is generally dependent on a young person's pathway into the service and whether they have contact with other agencies.

### Information-sharing across agencies

Professionals highlighted this is key to avoid re-traumatising young people. Services and individuals need to recognise that young people have often been passed between services and accommodation projects for years, and have had multiple professionals come in and out of their lives. This has an impact on young people's willingness to engage and trust in a new organisation. Sharing information means that services and professionals do not need to ask a young person to repeat their story again, and allows young people to talk about their experiences in their own time.

#### Young People's Passport (Young Minds)

Young Minds have developed a tool to help young people using services, or parents with younger children, to own and communicate their story when moving between different services, via CYP-IAPT.

<https://youngminds.org.uk/youngminds-professionals/our-projects/amplified/>

[www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2015/10/cyp-info-passport-yp-example.pdf](http://www.england.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2015/10/cyp-info-passport-yp-example.pdf)

### Taking an observational/active listening approach and utilising specialist knowledge

Staff should not try to diagnose young people themselves, however there may be indicators that a young person's mental health or wellbeing is an area they need support with. Raising staff awareness and providing training about mental health and trauma can provide the knowledge and skills required to recognise if young person needs support around their mental health, without them directly disclosing. Free training around mental health is often available through local authority safeguarding boards, or through utilising online resources such as the Young Minds website.

### List of Local Safeguarding Boards:

[www.safeguardinginschools.co.uk/list-of-lscb-local-safeguarding-child-boards/](http://www.safeguardinginschools.co.uk/list-of-lscb-local-safeguarding-child-boards/)

### Information and resources:

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/a-z-mental-health/](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/a-z-mental-health/)

[www.youngminds.org.uk/resources/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/resources/)

It is important to consider how young people's previous experiences impact their wellbeing, and their engagement with services, for example experiences of multiple care and/or accommodation placements. The experiences that lead to young people being in contact with, for example, social services, will have had an impact of their wellbeing. Their experience of services may have been positive or negative; often the experience of going through systems itself can be traumatising, or reinforce trauma already experienced. Whatever young people's experiences are, they will affect young people's relationships services, including their trust in professionals and consequent willingness to engage, and their knowledge and experience of navigating systems. Being aware of these previous experiences and integrating this knowledge with the way we understand young people's thought processes and behaviour can help professionals better meet the needs of the young people. This is discussed below in the "[working in psychologically and trauma informed ways](#)" section of this document.

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### Providing young people safe and non-therapeutic spaces

It is valuable to provide informal spaces and activities where the primary focus isn't a young person's well-being, and how young people are more likely to feel safe to talk about how they are feeling in these spaces.

Informal approaches to working with young people e.g. talking to young people while playing pool, going for a walk with a young person or driving, can be beneficial in building trusting relationships, instead of sitting opposite someone in a formal 'support' capacity, or engaging in therapeutic practice which young people often find intimidating and/or aren't ready for.

### Improving young people's access to support

The accessibility of mental health support and other services is a key issue for homelessness services. Where young people aren't able to access the right support at the right time, their mental health can deteriorate while they're waiting for services or accessing inappropriate support. This often has an impact on their housing, as it will affect how they are able to engage with services, sustain a tenancy, and how safe they feel within a service. Often behaviour seen as 'anti-social' stems from young people's feelings of (a lack of) safety and control, which can be the consequence of not receiving the right type of support earlier in their lives.

### Partnership working

Network event attendees identified the benefits of building relationships with other local services to utilise a range of resources, and provide for a variety of support for young people.

They highlighted having professionals from other services/specialist services on site on a drop-in or permanent basis, for example nurses, mental health workers and psychologists can improve young people's willingness to engage with support. This practice allows young people time and space to become familiar with other professionals, and makes accessing support less daunting. It also means young people don't have to travel which was highlighted as a key barrier.

#### Bethany House Splitz IDVA

Bethany House provides accommodation for single homeless young women aged 16-18 (up to 25 for care leavers). They provide 10 en-suite bedrooms and three self-contained flats. Staff are on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year with (emergency only) sleep-in staff from 11pm-7am.

Bethany House work in partnership with Splitz, the local domestic abuse service, to provide monthly drop in sessions with an independent domestic abuse advisor (IDVA). The IDVA attends the accommodation and staff can identify young women they are worried about, or young women can drop in to speak to the IDVA when they want. The strength of this practice is that young women who would not otherwise have accessed support around their relation, due to confidence, or not seeing their relationship as unhealthy or abusive, are able to engage with the IDVA in an accessible and known setting.

Some organisations had benefitted from bringing in specialists to respond to specific needs during periods where certain issues were particularly prominent. For example, there are often periods where lots of young people within services are self-harming, as they share these coping mechanisms with each other, and bringing in specialist nurses who can support around self-harm during these times can be beneficial.

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### Young Devon

Through Exeter City's homeless partnership, the Homeless Prevention team at Young Devon have access to support from clinical psychologists. The clinical team support staff through training, group supervision and consultation when they are struggling to support individual young people. The partnership enables staff to learn from other professionals and reflect on their practice, in order to adjust their approach and work with a young person.

Through providing this reflective space and support, staff competencies and confidence in working with young people who may have experienced complex trauma are developed, and staff are supported to work flexibly and creatively to support the young person in the best way possible.

Building links with other professionals provides an opportunity to share knowledge, skills and learning from across sectors, and improve referral pathways between services.

Some services highlighted the need for a stabilisation period for some young people, before they access mental health support. This was linked to trauma and safety, which we discuss more below.

### **Taking time to recognise and break down barriers created by therapeutic and medicalised language**

Network attendees raised that young people often don't understand what support is on offer, who is providing it and what accessing the support means, due to medicalised and complex language surround mental health support. This is particularly the case where English is a young person's second language.

Homelessness services can prepare young people before they access mental health services or while they are waiting for this type of support so they know what to expect, for example using YouTube videos that explain what therapy is. Staff need to take the time to demystify services and address associated stigma and fear. Speaking to young people about the role and remit of different services, for example children's social services, is helpful in achieving this.

### Mind

Mind have developed resources, available online, explaining what talking therapies are, what happens during therapy and how to get the most from therapy.

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapy/#.XhXg0sZI-Un](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapy/#.XhXg0sZI-Un)

### Young Minds

Young Minds have developed a guide to the NHS's Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) for young people and parents, and a range of resources for you people about mental health and wellbeing:

[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/)

Cultural barriers can also be a challenge, for example a common experience raised was supporting young asylum seekers who don't engage with or speak about their mental health and trauma. This then often builds and manifests in high risk ways, for example self-harm. Practitioners highlighted the need for ongoing awareness of the additional barriers some young people may face in accessing mental health support.

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### Flexible assessments/information gathering

Network attendees spoke about the importance of flexible needs assessments/case recording systems, where mental health sections don't need to be completed and can be added to. Young people may not identify or be able to speak about their own mental wellbeing until they've received some support and feel safe to start exploring this with a service/worker. Flexible assessments are important to respond to young people's emerging support needs. This flexibility also places less pressure on practitioners to label young people.

### Young Women's Housing Projects: In-house Therapeutic Services

YWHP provide a range of therapeutic services including:

#### Person centred counselling

YWHP's counselling services have been developed to increase accessibility of therapeutic support to clients. Prior to the in-house counselling programme residents wishing to engage with this type of support were unable to keep external counselling appointments for any length of time.

#### Creative Movement Therapy

YWHP also provide CMT, which aims to create a space for clients to address and improve their mental, emotional, physical well-being and resiliency. This practice has developed out of the values and theory of dance movement psychotherapy; however, practice can be less intense and more flexible. The CMT sessions have improved health and well-being, increased independence and helped young women involved to become more empowered.

In both Person Centred Counselling and Creative Movement Therapy:

- Young women accessing these services are given support attending appointments, for example through, travel arrangements, childcare, appointment reminds and support workers check-in after sessions, recognising that these can be intense or unsettling experiences for clients. Sessions themselves are delivered flexibly, for example young women can have telephone sessions if they can't make a session, or don't want a face-to-face appointment, and they are also not penalised if they miss a session. Sessions are also open-ended, which means clients have control, ending support when they feel they are ready.
- Behaviour is not judged and is recognised as a response to how the client perceives the world
- Young women are not penalised for non-attendance
- Integration within the YWHP has been achieved by clear messaging around confidentiality and boundaries between the different YWHP services, updated risk assessments are shared with therapists where relevant and necessary, support worker and therapist integration/whole team development via shared work spaces, team meetings, group reflective practice, team training sessions and a team approach to supporting access such as, support workers accompanying clients to initial appointments.
- Psychoeducation: trauma is explored with clients within the therapeutic relationship but only once a connection and trust has been established.

[www.ywhp.org.uk](http://www.ywhp.org.uk)

### Working in psychologically and trauma informed ways

Throughout the network events there were discussions about how providing psychologically informed environments and trauma informed support can have a positive impact on young people's wellbeing in services.

#### Focus on building relationships and trust

Practitioners highlighted the importance of breaking down barriers between staff and young people, and discussed how they have adapted their practice to create spaces where staff and young people are more likely to be able to build a trusting relationship. Some examples were:



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- changing the assessment process from being interview based to having more informal conversations with young people
- increasing staff presence in communal spaces and having less of a physical divide between young people's space and staff offices

These actions can create a more natural and a less clinical relationship between staff and residents, allow young people become familiar with staff without having to engage in a support session or having a problem they need to ask for help to resolve, and encourage young people to spend time in social spaces.

### **Providing welcoming and safe physical spaces purpose built for young people**

This can be done, for example, by giving consideration to colours of walls, painting murals, having visible signs of inclusion e.g. rainbow or trans flags, challenging discriminatory language, and creating opportunities to involve young people in the design of services through specific art projects. Consulting with young people about what they want from the physical space and giving them a stake in their environment is also a way in which services can rebuild young people's control.

#### **Young Devon – Exeter YES Centre**

Young Devon runs YES (Youth Enquiry Service) centres across Devon, which offer young people free and confidential advice and support about the following:

- work and study;
- health and wellbeing;
- leaving care support;
- housing and welfare rights;
- sex and relationships;
- alcohol and drugs;
- travel;

Young Devon consulted with young people about one of the centres, asking what worked for them and what could be made better. They did this through a survey which was disseminated online, and completed by those accessing the centre for support around employability, homelessness, and wellbeing. The centre was also 'mystery shopped' by the Youth Council, who gave a full report of the experience of the centre. The responses were then used to identify what could be done to make the centre more accessible. Changes were made to make the space empowering and welcoming, to ensure young people had a safe space that maintained their privacy. The team approached the local Co-op for support to refurbish the centre.

Based on feedback waiting areas were re-organised to create two seating spaces, one more open and the other in a more enclosed and private. YES obtained a music licence so they can play the radio in reception, as young people fed back that the centre was often quiet and they were worried they'd be overheard. Motivational and inspirational quotes were chosen by young people to have on the walls, and the centre got bright colour furnishings. The centre also added noticeboards to the reception areas; two provide information on services and one provides a space for young people to contribute to, for example sharing their own art or writing. Young people directed and designed the refurb and were involved in all stages, including when the centre applied for planning permission for a new sign.

Young Devon highlight that part of creating safe physical environments is having a clear process for managing the space and the people in the building. Young people enter the centre with a range of emotional and practical challenges and staff work hard to be aware of this and try and understand and predict what young people may need, how the space may be impacting them and how it can be used to alleviate any stress or anxiety they are feeling.

[www.youngdevon.org/where-we-work/exeter-yes-centre](http://www.youngdevon.org/where-we-work/exeter-yes-centre)



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### Empowering young people/rebuilding control

Young people accessing homelessness support have often had contact with multiple services and have lacked control or input in the decisions that have been made about their lives, for example where they live and what support and other services they can access. In addition, many young people accessing homelessness services have had multiple traumatic experiences in early childhood and/or during adolescence. Network attendees spoke about the importance of taking a flexible 'elastic tolerance' approach that recognises the impact of trauma on behaviour, and behaviour as communication, in order to provide appropriate and positive interventions, that place a young person's control at the centre of support.

Other ways organisations can rebuild young people's control are:

- including young people in the planning of physical spaces
- giving them choice in decoration of communal spaces and their own rooms
- involving them in recruitment
- building resilience through focussing on their strengths, for example through strengths based interviewing
- focussing on achievements and developments of the young people, no matter how small

### Providing support for staff

Network attendees spoke about the importance of supporting staff so that they are in the best place to support and invest in relationships with residents. Examples provided to build staff resilience were:

- providing clinical supervision
- providing training and building awareness about trauma and vicarious trauma
- bringing staff together in reflective spaces
- providing independent mentoring for staff.

#### The Shine Project: The Six Thinking Hats

Funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the Shine Regional Complex Needs project aims to ensure young people who have complex needs receive equal access and services across a number of YMCAs within the central region.

Developed by Edward de Bono, a physician and psychologist, Six Thinking Hats is utilised by The Shine Project as a tool to reflect on practice and situations, and help staff overcome the challenges they may be experiencing, either in relation to people or situations.

This activity involves staff looking at problems with different 'hats' on. Each hat has a different function and takes a different approach to a problem. Staff members use the same hat to approach a problem at one time, and then as a group moves on they consider the problem with the next hat or approach.

**White Hat:** Facts

**Yellow Hat:** Benefits

**Red Hat:** Emotions

**Green Hat:** Creativity

**Black Hat:** Challenges

**Blue Hat:** Process

The exercise supports teams to work collaboratively, and systematically facilitating people to spot opportunities and view situations from unusual or different angles.

Network attendees highlighted the importance of organisational buy-in to embed psychologically and trauma informed practice in to services, and the need to reflect on ethos, culture and structure of the team and organisation. One example was the importance of organisations looking at the impact of under-staffing, and how this can lead to staff stress and burn-out, consequently placing stress on the relationships they've built with residents.

They also spoke about the importance in reflecting on the spaces and meetings that bring staff together, for example in team meetings staff members may need to use the space to offload, and meetings can be planned around this, for example including regular breaks. Some attendees highlighted the need for more opportunities for staff to come together, in both structured and unstructured meetings.

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### Conclusion

We hope this briefing has provided some ideas on how organisations and individuals can support and promote the wellbeing of young people accessing homelessness services. Many of the discussions and suggestions are based from learning from trauma and psychologically informed approaches and strengths-based practice. There is more information on these approaches in the resources section below. We are always keen to hear about good practice happening in local areas that can be shared with the sector, please do get in touch if you would like to share practice and ideas that support young people's wellbeing.

## Resources

### Tools and resources for professionals and young people

#### Online counselling service

[www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

#### Freedom Programme: domestic abuse resource

[www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/](http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/)

[www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/docs/dominator-mr-right.pdf](http://www.freedomprogramme.co.uk/docs/dominator-mr-right.pdf)

#### Brook

Resources for professionals: [www.legacy.brook.org.uk/shop/category/resources](http://www.legacy.brook.org.uk/shop/category/resources)

Help and advice for young people: [www.brook.org.uk/help-advice/](http://www.brook.org.uk/help-advice/)

#### Contextual Safeguarding Network

<https://www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk/>

*Contextual safeguarding is an approach to safeguarding children and young people which responds to their experiences of harm outside the home.*

#### Mind: types of counselling support available

[www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapy/#.XhXg0sZI-Un](http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/talking-therapy-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapy/#.XhXg0sZI-Un)

#### Young Minds: navigating CAMHS

[www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/your-guide-to-support/)

#### On My Mind, Anna Freud Centre: co-produced mental health and wellbeing website

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/>

*Website with range of resources to empower young people to make informed choices about their mental health and wellbeing*

### Related Homeless Link guidance

#### Creating a Psychologically Informed Environment

[www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Creating%20a%20Psychologically%20Informed%20Environment%20-%202015.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Creating%20a%20Psychologically%20Informed%20Environment%20-%202015.pdf)

#### Managing Medication

[www.homelesslink.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Managing%20Medication%20briefing%20Dec2016.pdf](http://www.homelesslink.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Managing%20Medication%20briefing%20Dec2016.pdf)

#### Positive Approaches

[www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Positive%20approaches%202018\\_0.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Positive%20approaches%202018_0.pdf)

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### **Youth Homelessness Scoping Report**

[www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Youth%20Homelessness%20scoping%20report%20July%202019%20pdf.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Youth%20Homelessness%20scoping%20report%20July%202019%20pdf.pdf)

### **Young & Homeless 2018**

[www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Young%20and%20Homeless%202018.pdf](http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Young%20and%20Homeless%202018.pdf)

### **Trauma Informed Care and Psychologically Informed Environments**

[www.homeless.org.uk/trauma-informed-care-and-psychologically-informed-environments](http://www.homeless.org.uk/trauma-informed-care-and-psychologically-informed-environments)

## Sector research and reports

### **Young Minds (2017) Addressing adversity**

<https://youngminds.org.uk/media/2142/ym-addressing-adversity-book-web.pdf>

*E-book around adversity and trauma. We used Chapter 7: Young people's principles for adversity and trauma informed care*

### **Llamau (2015) Study of the Experiences of Young Homeless People (SEYHoPe) Key findings & implications**

<https://www.llamau.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3a84ee00-b19e-4007-b0a4-a2629ea344de>

### **YHNE (2019), 'Why do I feel like this?' Mental Health Briefing**

<https://www.yhne.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Mental-Health-Project-Final-Report-April-2019-.pdf>

### **UK Youth (2018) A Place to belong: The role of local youth organisations in addressing youth loneliness**

<https://ukyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/A-Place-To-Belong-The-role-of-local-youth-organisations-in-addressing-youth-loneliness.pdf>



## What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

## Let's end homelessness together

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Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/homelesslink](http://www.facebook.com/homelesslink)

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