

Youth Homelessness

Scoping report July 2019

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link, Minories House, 2-5 Minories, London EC3N 1BJ | 020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk | Twitter: @Homelesslink | Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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Introduction

Young people experiencing homelessness are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Youth homelessness is a key area of concern for Homeless Link, and since 2011 we have produced our *Young & Homeless* research.¹ This provides an annual dataset that highlights trends and developments that we use to advocate for better services and support for young people experiencing homelessness. This research has shown how young people continue to be over-represented in homelessness services: 30% of people accessing homelessness services in England in 2018 were aged 16-25² despite this age group only accounting for 12.3% of the total population.³

Youth homelessness is a strategic priority for Homeless Link. In our three-year organisational strategy 'Creating the Change' we commit to "*identifying interventions, opportunities and risks to specifically prevent and tackle youth homelessness.*"⁴ With funding secured from Comic Relief we started this work in 2019. We have established a national youth homelessness advisory group; started to build a network of youth homelessness organisations through regional meetings; and visited youth homelessness projects across England, both inside and outside our membership. To date, we have engaged with 39 organisations to inform our work, and this national engagement is ongoing.

Our starting point is a scoping exercise to provide us with an overview of youth homelessness, and this report summarises the main findings. We highlight how the multiple forms of structural disadvantage are impacting young people and their pathways in to and out of homelessness; who may be most at risk of homelessness; and the support needs of young people who are homeless. In order to achieve independence for young people, particularly young people who are homeless, they need access to a range of support services, including mental health support.

Using this scoping activity as a baseline, we outline the next steps for this work. We will continue to listen to and work with our members in order to find ways to improve the response to young people who face homelessness.

Youth Homelessness in numbers

In 2017/18 it was estimated that around 84,000 young people in England approached their local authority due to being homeless or at risk.⁵ For 52% of the young people who presented to a local authority in 2017/18 there was no documented support provided, leaving them at risk of homelessness, or leading them to become hidden homeless.⁶ 35% were offered support through prevention and relief duty (e.g. supporting someone to remain in their home) and 13% were accepted as statutory homeless.⁷ Respondents to our Young & Homeless research reported that they had seen levels of youth homelessness either remaining the same or increasing in their area from 2016 to 2017.⁸

¹ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

² Homeless Link (2018), Support for single homeless people in England: Annual review 2018 (forthcoming)

³ Statistic available at:

www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/overviewoftheukpopulation/november2018

⁴ www.homeless.org.uk/about-us/our-vision-and-strategy

⁵ Centrepoint (2018), Making homeless young people count: The scale of youth homelessness in the UK: <https://centrepoint.org.uk/media/3069/making-homeless-young-people-count.pdf>

⁶ 'Hidden Homelessness' refers to households where people are homeless but whose situation is not 'visible' either on the streets or in official statistics, for example, households living in severely overcrowded conditions, people 'sofa-surfing' around friends' or relatives' homes, those involuntarily sharing with other households on a long-term basis, and people sleeping rough in hidden locations.

⁷ A young person in England is considered to be statutorily homeless and owed a housing duty if they are eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need.

⁸ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

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In the 2018 annual single night snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough in England, 296 people were aged 25 and under – 6% of the total.⁹ The age was unknown for 14% of people. London CHAIN data showed that, in 2018/19, 8% of people rough sleeping were under 25 (692).¹⁰ Research has shown that young people are likely to go through periods of hidden homelessness, staying in multiple informal temporary living arrangements. DePaul UK found that 60% of young people accessing homelessness services had at one stage been living with close friends, 23% had stayed with acquaintances and 11% had stayed with strangers.¹¹

Why are young people homeless?

Young people in England today face multiple forms of structural disadvantage. For example, young people face a disproportionate risk of poverty and destitution, reductions in welfare benefit entitlements, and discrimination in the housing and labour markets.¹² All these factors put young people at particular risk of homelessness and insecure housing.

There is evidence that the impact of austerity policies introduced by the Government since 2010 have had the greatest impact on young people.¹³ According to the Equality and Human Rights Commission, young people are facing the worst economic prospects for several generations,¹⁴ and they concluded that there is an age inequality gap in Britain. Young people are facing the steepest fall in incomes and employment compared to older groups, they have less access to decent housing and face greater barriers to achieving economic independence and success than five years ago. Recent research has also found that young people are now the group most likely to be living in poverty.¹⁵

Evidence shows that many of the welfare reform changes introduced over the past few years have impacted significantly on young people. For example research has shown that compared to older claimants, young people are at a higher risk of benefits sanctions,¹⁶ which can significantly reduce the income an individual will receive through social security benefits. Homeless Link's research highlighted the detrimental impact that sanctions had on young people's housing options.¹⁷

The eligible rent for those aged below 35 has been capped to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR)¹⁸ and this is set under Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rules. This means that under 35 year olds will only be entitled to enough LHA to cover the average cost of a single room in a shared house. Research has found that under-investment in LHA rates means that in 92% of areas in England in 2018/19 rents are unaffordable under LHA.¹⁹ Our conversations with youth homelessness organisations have highlighted that limited availability of private rented sector (PRS) accommodation below the SAR rate, alongside barriers to accessing social housing, negatively impact on young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation in their area.

⁹ MHCLG (2018), Rough Sleeping Statistics Autumn 2018, England (revised):

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/781567/Rough_Sleeping_Statistics_2018_release.pdf

¹⁰ Chain annual report greater London April 2018 - March 2019: <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

¹¹ DePaul UK (2018), Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/sites/default/files/danger-zones-appendices-final.pdf>

¹² Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

¹³ Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (2015) The Coalition's Social Policy Record 2010-15

¹⁴ Equality and Human Rights Committee (2015), Is Britain Fairer? The state of equality and

human rights 2015: www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/is-britain-fairer-2015.pdf

¹⁵ Tom MacInnes et al (2015), Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2015: www.jrf.org.uk/mpse-2015

¹⁶ The International Inequalities Institute (2017), Inequalities in the application of welfare sanctions in Britain:

www.lse.ac.uk/International-Inequalities/Assets/Documents/Working-Papers/III-Working-Paper-15-Inequalities-in-the-application-of-welfare-sanctions-in-Britain-de-Vries-Reeves-and-Geiger.pdf

¹⁷ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

¹⁸ The SAR is the maximum amount of housing benefit or universal credit housing costs paid when renting a room in a shared house from a private landlord.

¹⁹ Crisis (2019), Cover the Costs: How gaps in Local Housing Allowance are impacting homelessness:

www.crisis.org.uk/media/240377/cover_the_cost_2019.pdf

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There is also a shortage of emergency accommodation designed for young people.²⁰ This often results in them accessing adult services which may not be designed to meet their needs, can be intimidating, put young people at risk, and can be detrimental to their mental health. We heard feedback about the need for emergency accommodation for young people that meets their specific needs – for example there is a lack of women-only accommodation, and a lack of accommodation services that can support young people with mental health needs. These changes, alongside significant cuts in funding for youth services and support,²¹ have had a detrimental impact on young people and their ability to transition successfully into independence.

We heard that a main cause of youth homelessness was due to relationship breakdown, primarily within the family. Young & Homeless 2018²² found that parents/carers no longer being able or willing to accommodate was the cause of 49% of young people's homelessness. The reasons behind this may be structural, interpersonal or individual.²³ Research indicates that these reasons can intersect: young people often leave or are forced to leave home due to long-term conflict,²⁴ and this conflict is often the result of building tension within the home due to financial hardship, housing and labour market pressures.²⁵ Some young people will leave the family home due to experiences of physical and/or sexual abuse. Evidence indicates this is more common among some young people, for example LGBTQ+ young people.²⁶

Who is particularly vulnerable to homelessness?

Certain groups of young people may be at greater risk of homelessness due to further experiences of discrimination and/or disadvantage, for example, racism, homophobia, violence and abuse and experiences of institutional care. These will all impact on young people's experiences of systems and services, and their pathways into independence, potentially placing them at greater risk of homelessness. We identified the groups below as being at particular risk of becoming and remaining homeless.

Young People who are from Black and Ethnic Minority backgrounds

Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) households are over-represented in homelessness services and statistics.^{27, 28} Research suggests that, in part, this can be accounted for by structural factors, for example BAME communities are more likely to be living in poverty,²⁹ more likely to be in poor standard housing in a deprived area and are more likely to be hidden homeless and living in overcrowded conditions.³⁰ BAME individuals are also more likely to experience benefit sanctions,³¹ and are likely to have lower levels of financial resources to cope with delays in payment and sanctions.³²

²⁰ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

²¹ Unison (2014), The UK's youth services how cuts are removing opportunities for young people and damaging their lives:

www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/07/On-line-Catalogue225322.pdf

²² Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

²³ Centrepoin (2016), Families under pressure: Preventing family breakdown and youth homelessness: https://centrepoin.org.uk/media/1701/families-under-pressure_final.pdf

²⁴ Deborah Quiglar, Sarah Johnsen, Nicholas Pleace (2008), Youth Homelessness in the UK: a decade of progress?

https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/481249/JRF_Youth_Homelessness_FinalReport.pdf

²⁵ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

²⁶ <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/sites/default/files/danger-zones-appendices-final.pdf>

²⁷ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

²⁸ Kevin Gulliver (2016), Forty Years of Struggle A Window on Race and Housing, Disadvantage and Exclusion:

<https://bmenational.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/forty-years-of-struggle-a-window-on-race-and-housing-disadvantage-and-exclusion1.pdf>

²⁹ Deborah Garvie (2017), BAME homelessness matters and is disproportionately rising – time for the government to act:

<https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2017/10/bame-homelessness-matters-and-is-disproportionately-rising-time-for-the-government-to-act/>

³⁰ Kevin Gulliver (2016), Forty Years of Struggle A Window on Race and Housing, Disadvantage and Exclusion:

<https://bmenational.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/forty-years-of-struggle-a-window-on-race-and-housing-disadvantage-and-exclusion1.pdf>

³¹ The International Inequalities Institute (2017), Inequalities in the application of welfare sanctions in Britain: www.lse.ac.uk/International-Inequalities/Assets/Documents/Working-Papers/III-Working-Paper-15-Inequalities-in-the-application-of-welfare-sanctions-in-Britain-de-Vries-Reeves-and-Geiger.pdf

³² Kalwinder Sandhu (2017), Universal Credit and impact on black and minority ethnic communities:

<http://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Better-Housing-27-Universal-Credit.pdf>

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While housing deprivation among BAME people reflects structural inequalities in the housing market, research shows that this “cannot be solely accounted for by where ethnic groups live, social status, their age, family structure or when they arrived in Britain.”³³ As highlighted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation “Ethnicity interacts with gender, class, education, disability and geography to affect poverty. Racism and discrimination are major factors limiting opportunities for people from ethnic minority groups.”³⁴

LGBTQ+

Young people who identify as LGBTQ+ are particularly at risk of homelessness, with an estimated 24% of the homeless youth population identifying as LGBTQ+.³⁵ Research has shown that young LGBTQ+ people often become homeless because of family rejection due to their sexual orientation or gender identity.³⁶ We heard that youth organisations are seeing an increase in the number of LGBTQ+ young people accessing their services, particularly young transgender people. We also heard that young LGBTQ+ homeless people often migrate to towns and cities which have more visible LGBTQ+ communities and access to specialist support.

Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrant homelessness

We have been told that homelessness services are seeing increasing numbers of young migrants and asylum seekers and refugees aged 16-24. Our 2017 research found 6% of young people accessing services were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) or had refugee status.³⁷ Homelessness among young refugees may be due to systems failures: NACCOM identified that during the 28 day ‘move-on’ period for those granted refugee status, young people are not being provided with the appropriate support to secure accommodation, resulting in them becoming homeless.³⁸ Legislation changes such as Right to Rent checks will also disadvantage this group of young people,³⁹ creating additional barriers to accessing secure accommodation.

Young people leaving institutional care

Young people leaving institutional care are particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Research shows that one third of young people leaving social care become homeless in the first two years immediately after leaving care⁴⁰ and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.⁴¹ In conversations with youth homelessness organisations, young care leavers are raised as a group that are over-represented in services, and are a particularly vulnerable group who have often had experiences of multiple disadvantage.

Research has shown one in three young people leaving young offender institutions are placed in unsuitable accommodation such as bed and breakfasts or unsupported adult hostels,⁴² and one in seven people who left

³³ Nigel do Noronha (2015), Ethnic disadvantage in the housing market: Evidence from the 2011 census:

<https://raceequalityfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Housing-Briefing-26.pdf>

³⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014), Tackling poverty across all ethnicities in the UK:

www.jrf.org.uk/report/tackling-poverty-across-all-ethnicities-uk

³⁵ The Albert Kennedy Trust (2015) LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response & Outcome:

www.akt.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c0f29272-512a-45e8-9f9b-0b76e477baf1

³⁶ Laura Durso, Gary Gates (2012), Serving our youth: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>

³⁷ Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018:

www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Young%20and%20Homeless%202018.pdf

³⁸ NACCOM (2018), Mind the Gap: <https://naccomm.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NACCOM-Homelessness-Report-2018-10-24.pdf>

³⁹ Deborah Garvie (2017), BAME homelessness matters and is disproportionately rising – time for the government to act:

<https://blog.shelter.org.uk/2017/10/bame-homelessness-matters-and-is-disproportionately-rising-time-for-the-government-to-act/>

⁴⁰ All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ending Homelessness (2017). Homelessness prevention for care leavers, prison leavers and survivors of domestic violence: www.crisis.org.uk/media/237534/appg_for_ending_homelessness_report_2017_pdf.pdf

⁴¹ P. Mackie and I. Thomas (2014), Nations Apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain, London:

www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf

⁴² Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2016), Accommodation of Homeless 16 and 17 Year Old Children Working With Youth Offending Teams:

www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/09/Thematic-Report-Accommodation-of-Homeless-16-and-17-Year-Old-Children.pdf

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prison in 2017/2018 were homeless.⁴³ Evidence links young people who have been in custody and rough sleeping,⁴⁴ and experiences of violence and abuse, including sexual violence in the home.⁴⁵

Support needs

Conversations during our scoping exercise highlighted how young people accessing homelessness services are increasingly experiencing multiple disadvantage including contact with the criminal justice system, poor physical health, mental health and substance use issues, and that these experiences are often rooted in adverse childhood experiences including trauma as a result of abuse and/or violence and neglect.

Research shows that experiences of homelessness can both precede and follow from young people's mental health needs, offending behaviour, and substance use.^{46,47,48,49}

Young people who are homeless often experience violence and/or abuse prior to becoming homeless and their homelessness increases their vulnerability to further abuse.⁵⁰ There is limited information on how these experiences intersect, research into multiple exclusion among homeless adults⁵¹ tells us that the vast majority have shared experiences of troubled childhoods, with histories of trauma, distress or exclusion as a child, including abuse, bullying, neglect and violence.

We heard that supporting multiple disadvantaged young people was one of the greatest challenges due to homelessness services not having enough resources and due to facing additional barriers in accessing support through other sectors, such as appropriate mental health and/or drug and alcohol support. This echoes findings from Young & Homeless 2018.⁵² We heard that the lack of support for young people with multiple needs places them at greater risk of exploitation, deteriorating mental health and offending/anti-social behaviour.

The difference in support needs between young men and young women has also been highlighted during the scoping exercise. Research has shown that women's homelessness is often hidden, and often occurs after prolonged experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, frequently within the home.⁵³ Our conversations with youth organisations highlighted that young women's homelessness is particularly linked to sexual violence and specifically child sexual exploitation. Young men's experiences of homelessness were also associated with exploitation, however this was more frequently linked with criminal exploitation, including gang-related crime and running county lines.^{54, 55}

⁴³ Prison Reform Trust (2018), Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile:

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Autumn%202018%20Factfile.pdf

⁴⁴ Centrepoint (2018), Have you got anybody you can stay with?

<https://centrepoint.org.uk/media/2610/centrepoint-custody-leavers-report.pdf>

⁴⁵ Prison Reform Trust (2012), Old Enough to Know Better: www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/portals/0/documents/oldenoughtoknowbetter.pdf

⁴⁶ Mental Health Foundation (2006), Making the link between mental health and youth homelessness: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/making-link-between-mental-health-and-youth-homelessness

⁴⁷ Prison Reform Trust (2018), Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile:

www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Bromley%20Briefings/Autumn%202018%20Factfile.pdf

⁴⁸ Centrepoint (2018), Have you got anybody you can stay with?

<https://centrepoint.org.uk/media/2610/centrepoint-custody-leavers-report.pdf>

⁴⁹ Centrepoint (2014), Toxic Mix: The health needs of homeless young people:

<https://centrepoint.org.uk/media/1717/toxic-mix-exec-sum.pdf>

⁵⁰ https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/481249/JRF_Youth_Homelessness_FinalReport.pdf

⁵¹ Theresa McDonagh et al (2011) Multiple Exclusion Homelessness Research Programme, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

⁵² Homeless Link (2018), Young & Homeless 2018: www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research

⁵³ St Mungo's (2014), Rebuilding Shattered Lives: https://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wpcontent/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives_Final-Report.pdf

⁵⁴ County lines is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas (within the UK), using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of 'deal line'. They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move (and store) the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) or weapons.

www.cps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/legal_guidance/County-Lines-typology.docx

⁵⁵ Home Office (2010), Criminal Exploitation of children and vulnerable adults: County Lines guidance:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/741194/HOCountyLinesGuidanceSept2018.pdf

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Feedback during our scoping exercise highlighted how personal connections and emotional support are key protective factors that support young people into adulthood and achieve independence. We were told in order to address the range of challenges an increasing number of young people experiencing multiple disadvantage face, a wide range of support needs to be available. This support needs for flexible, strengths based and person-led support that is not time restricted. We heard that organisations were working towards psychologically and trauma informed approaches to providing support to young homeless people and that these approaches need to be invested in and developed further.

Next steps

Young people who are homeless face a range of intersecting disadvantages, and the impact of homelessness on young people is significant. There is a role for Homeless Link, as a national umbrella body, to support and represent our members in order to improve youth homelessness responses and prevention, within homelessness and across related sectors and issues.

Our next steps will include:

- Publishing more detailed briefings and guidance on topics raised by members during the scoping work
- Identifying what support young people need and examples of good practice, with a focus on how existing models such as Psychologically Informed Environments, Trauma Informed Care and Housing First can be tailored for young people
- Helping to promote prevention frameworks such as the Positive Pathway⁵⁶
- Conducting a gap analysis on how sectors can work together to prevent youth homelessness and effectively support young people who become homeless

We have highlighted the structural disadvantages young people face. We will:

- Continue our policy work on welfare reform, ensuring there is a specific youth response where needed
- Identify and respond to policy changes that may impact on youth homelessness as well as identifying policy solutions that will contribute to ending it.

We have identified that certain groups of young people may be more vulnerable to homelessness and we will further explore the specific needs of these groups including:

- Young people from BAME background
- Young people identifying as LGBTQ+
- Young people with experience of the care system, including Looked After Children and Children in Need
- Young people experiencing multiple disadvantage/with intersecting needs

We will also be finding ways to involve young people, working with colleagues both within and beyond the youth homelessness sector in order to reach young people to inform this work as it develops.

⁵⁶ St Basils (2015), Developing Positive Pathways to Adulthood, available at: https://stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless or live with multiple and complex support needs. We work to improve services and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

Homeless Link
Minories House, 2-5 Minories
London EC3N 1BJ

020 7840 4430

www.homeless.org.uk

Twitter: @Homelesslink

Facebook: www.facebook.com/homelesslink

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