

Speaking Out Briefing No. 24

Housing and homelessness

Providing all children and young people with quality accommodation to prevent homelessness is a major priority and challenge for both central and local government. This paper sets out the current policy and legal context surrounding children, young people and homelessness; and the children and young people's voluntary and community sector. It provides case studies of good practice currently taking place and considers possible implications for the sector.

This briefing is part of the Speaking Out project.

Speaking Out

Speaking Out is a partnership between the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services (NCVYS) and Children England, which seeks to build a voice for the children and young people's voluntary and community sector across government.

The project aims to develop closer links between a range of government departments - including the Home Office, Ministry of Justice, Department of Health, Communities and Local Government, Cabinet Office and HM Treasury - and the voluntary and community sector in delivering cross-departmental policies that affect children and young people.

Speaking Out aims to support voluntary and community organisations that work with young people to better understand the impact of government policies on their service users and provide routes to influence policymaking.

The project is funded by the Office for Civil Society in the Cabinet Office.

Who are these briefings for?

This series of briefings intends to provide members of both NCVYS and Children England and other interested parties with background and analysis on specific policy items affecting the sector.

Other activities

In addition to these briefings the Speaking Out project is developing work streams around the policy themes which include:

- organising a series of seminars and events;
- policy and practice based research;
- making representations to government; and
- linking with wider NCVYS and Children England campaigns.

To discuss this briefing or any other aspect of the Speaking Out project, please contact Sophie Griffiths, Children England's Policy and Information Officer on 020 7833 3319 or email sophie@childrenengland.org.uk or Rhiannon Jones, NCVYS' Information and Website Officer 020 7278 1041 or email rhiannon@ncvys.org.uk.

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1. Introduction

According to Shelter, there are nearly 130,000 children under the age of 18 in Britain who are currently homeless – roughly the population of Oxford.¹ Furthermore, 31 per cent of children in England are being brought up in ‘non-decent’ homes that do not meet a sufficient standard of upkeep, facilities, insulation and heating.² Such figures present a challenge to government policy makers, and although a great deal of innovative work is being done to reduce these statistics, there is still a long way to go before all children and young people in England are adequately housed.

This briefing paper sets out the policy and legal context surrounding housing and homelessness, highlights key initiatives that prevent children and young people becoming homeless and considers possible implications for the children and young people’s voluntary and community sector in ensuring children and young people are made aware of housing issues.

What is homelessness?

The legal definition of homelessness includes rough sleepers, as well as those in temporary or insecure accommodation. For example, it can include families in overcrowded accommodation and young people ‘sofa surfing’ at friend’s houses.

The voluntary and public sectors differentiate between two groups of homeless people: those who are guaranteed housing by the state (statutory homeless) and those who are not (non-statutory homeless). Dealing with non-statutory homeless people is the focus of most work carried out by the voluntary sector. Families with children and young people are automatically categorised as statutory homeless and therefore offered housing assistance by local authorities. Single people are more likely to be classed as non-statutory homeless and are more likely to end up sleeping rough.

The long term impact of homelessness or poor housing on children, young people and their families is massive. Children living in bad housing are twice as likely to have been excluded from school as other children.³ They are also highly likely to suffer ill health and have parents who are unemployed.

Youth homelessness is a key area of concern for the Government and voluntary sector. The policy of lower benefits for under 25s coupled with an increase in family breakdown has led to increasing numbers of young people on the streets. Since 2002, 16-17 year olds have counted as ‘statutory homeless’ and make up around 10 per cent of accepted applicants for statutory assistance.⁴

Legal definition of homelessness

A person is legally homeless if they do not have a right to occupy accommodation, or if their accommodation is unfit to live in. This includes:

- Having no accommodation at all (rough sleeping);
- Having accommodation that is unacceptable to live in;
- Having a legal right to accommodation that is inaccessible (e.g. someone who has been illegally evicted);

¹Shelter, Keys to the Future project www.keystothefuture.org.uk

²<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlink=13675>

³Shelter (2006) *Against the odds*

⁴Communities and Local Government and National Statistics (2008) Housing Statistics 2007

- Living in accommodation that is illegal to occupy (e.g. living in a squat);
- Temporarily living with friends;
- Likely to be in one of the above situations within the next 28 days.⁵

⁵ Shelter (2007) *Shelter factsheet: Homelessness*

2. Policy context

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) has overall responsibility for housing and homelessness in England. The CLG's focus on reducing homelessness has largely been on prevention and on solving immediate housing requirements. The department has channelled funding into increasing the quantity and improving the quality of temporary accommodation for statutory homeless people. A significant proportion of this work has been carried out in collaboration with voluntary sector organisations.

Several Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) help CLG plan and carry out its policies. NDPBs are public organisations that assist government departments in making decisions on policy and practice, especially in areas where specialist knowledge might be needed. As NDPBs are not part of the Government, the day-to-day decisions they make are independent. Ministers are ultimately responsible to Parliament for the effectiveness of decisions made by NDPBs. NDPBs that relate to housing and homelessness include:

- The Homes and Community Agency (HCA) - The national housing and regeneration agency for England; and
- The Independent Housing Ombudsman - Considers complaints against member organisations, and other housing disputes.

Joint-working

In May 2008 CLG and the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) published guidance⁶ specifically relating to preventing homelessness and tackling its effects on children and young people and joint working between Housing and Children's Services. The purpose of the guidance is to help managers of Children's Services and Housing Authorities in both single tier and two tier authorities to plan and deliver changes for children, young people and families. A number of case studies and useful contacts are contained in this guidance.

Temporary accommodation

In 2005, CLG set a challenging target to halve the number of households living in temporary accommodation to 50,500 by 2010. The CLG strategy document *Sustainable Communities: Settled Homes; Changing Lives* (published March 2005) outlines how the Department planned to achieve this target and further reductions in homelessness by:

- Encouraging homelessness prevention;
- Supporting vulnerable people;
- Tackling its wider causes and symptoms;
- Helping more people to move away from rough sleeping; and
- Providing more settled homes.

⁶ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/goodpracticeguide>

This target was achieved in 2010, with 49,680 households being in temporary accommodation in September 2010. However this still equates to 71,460 homeless children in England living in temporary accommodation.⁷

Housing benefits

As part of the Coalition's efficiency savings, housing benefits are to be significantly reduced on the basis of age alone as the less generous 'shared room' rate of benefit is extended from under 25's to everyone under 35, saving an expected £215m. This will make it more difficult for younger people to keep hold of their own accommodation in the subsidised private rented sector. The rate reflects the amount of rent charged for a single room with shared use of the rest of a house - in many areas this rate will not cover the rent for available properties. Charities have warned this will lead to increased homelessness. Combined with the Coalition's proposed 10% cut in housing benefit for those out of work for a year, these policies will affect more than a quarter of a million young adults.

The Local Housing Allowance reforms will also have a direct impact on levels of homelessness. Recent research for Shelter by Cambridge Centre for Housing Policy and Research found that the cuts are likely to place 269,000 households into serious financial difficulty. Half of these households – up to 134,000 – will have to be moved or evicted. 72,000 of these are families equating to 129,000 children.

Rough sleeping

In November 2008, CLG launched a rough sleeping strategy, *No One Left Out - Communities ending rough sleeping*⁸, which is a fifteen point action plan that sets out CLG's vision to work with partners to end rough sleeping by 2012. The plan is backed by an allocation of £200 million, and includes measures such as:

- Increasing the options available to single people at risk of rough sleeping including help with deposits for renting a home and more supported lodgings;
- Expanding street rescue support teams run by the voluntary sector and encouraging greater use of a 24 hour phone line for members of the public to get help to rough sleepers they are concerned about;
- Working with those on the streets and those coming off to put together personal achievable action plans, to help them back into housing and employment;
- Charities, businesses and government will work more closely in new and innovative ways to help rough sleepers off the street and into employment; and
- New action across government departments to make sure people don't fall between different aspects of the support network. On health for example, this will mean better healthcare access for the homeless.

Local authorities conduct annual street counts of rough sleepers. The most recent figures in England in 2010 show there were 1,247 rough sleepers; a combined total of 440 from the 70 authorities that carried out a count and 807 from the 256 authorities that gave estimates. This was the first year that authorities were asked to supply estimates where no count was carried out, meaning that this new methodology has produced a significant increase from the previous year's figures.⁹

⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/homelessnessq32010>

⁸ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/roughsleepingstrategy>

⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/roughsleepingcount2010>

Youth homelessness

On 14 November 2006 the CLG announced a package of measures¹⁰ to tackle youth homelessness. These included:

- A commitment to end, by 2010, the use of bed and breakfast accommodation by local housing authorities in discharging their homelessness duty to secure suitable accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds. (This target has not been achieved as the latest figures show that in September 2010, 210 households were headed by 16-17 year olds in bed and breakfast style accommodation¹¹;
- Improved access to homelessness mediation across the country (including family mediation for young people), so that there is a general expectation of such services; and
- The creation of a new national supported lodgings development scheme providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home.

CLG also commissioned YMCA England and Centrepoint to develop an online knowledge base of existing national good practice to tackle and prevent youth homelessness. Key service providers and agencies working with young people have contributed to the website. The knowledge base was launched in October 2007 and covers prevention and early intervention, accommodation options and tackling other needs such as health and education/training. It also offers valuable information on working strategically.¹²

¹⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/homelessness/overviewkey>

¹¹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1791642.pdf>

¹² National Youth Homelessness Scheme www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness

Legal context

Homelessness Act

A *Homelessness Act*¹³ was passed in 2002 and increased the range of people with a statutory right to be housed, to include for instance 16 and 17 year old care leavers. The Act placed new obligations on local authorities to create homelessness strategies and required them to fund services to prevent homelessness.

Housing Act

The *Housing Act 2004*¹⁴ is a key piece of legislation, containing wide-ranging measures of reform aimed at protecting the most vulnerable in society while trying to create a fairer housing market for all those who own, rent or let residential property. The main provisions included:

- A new housing health and safety rating system to help local authorities target the worst-condition properties, often housing some of the most vulnerable people;
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) with mandatory licensing for larger, higher-risk HMOs and discretionary powers to license smaller, multiple-occupied properties;
- Enabling local authorities to tackle low housing demand and the difficulties of anti-social behaviour through new powers; and
- A provision to update by order, the statutory overcrowding provisions.

In April 2004, the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2003 came into force, which meant local authorities could no longer discharge their duty to families with children accepted as homeless by placing them in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for longer than six weeks.

Youth homelessness

In May 2009 the House of Lords passed a ruling¹⁵ which said that young people housed by local authorities are entitled to 'more than a roof over their heads'. The ruling means that local authorities have a duty of care to assess the wider needs of 16 and 17-year-olds who become homeless. The Law Lords ruled that councils should accommodate and support young people through their children's services rather than passing them to housing authorities and treat homeless 16 and 17 year olds as looked-after. The ruling also means that a number of 18- to 21-year-olds will be entitled to leaving care support.

However, Inside Housing magazine has published details of a Freedom of Information investigation which reveals that councils are flouting the government guidance designed to protect vulnerable homeless 16 and 17-year-olds. The investigation shows during the first 10 months of 2010, only 27% of the 6,677 housing applicants in this group had their support needs assessed, according to the survey of 99 councils.¹⁶

¹³ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020007_en_1

¹⁴ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/ukpga_20040034_en_1

¹⁵ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/8059651.stm>

¹⁶ <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/analysis/in-depth/who-cares/?/6513139.article>

3. Findings from research and practice

CLG has published a wide range of research on housing and homelessness. Of most relevance is a report¹⁷ on the experiences of homelessness for families and 16-17 year olds. The report found that:

- Families accepted as homeless were mainly young, headed by lone women parents, and workless;
- Young people accepted as homeless 16-17 year olds were an extremely vulnerable group, who had often experienced educational and/or family disruption, violence at home, and mental health and/or substance misuse problems. A very high proportion were not in education, employment or training;
- The main reasons for applying as homeless amongst families were relationship breakdown, eviction, overcrowding, or overstaying welcome;
- For young people the overwhelming reason for applying as homeless was relationship breakdown with parents or step-parents;
- Self-contained temporary accommodation was the most common form of provision for families with children; and
- Much of the temporary accommodation experienced by young people was 'supported' accommodation of various kinds. Most young people seemed to appreciate the company of other young people and the help from staff in such accommodation.

In November 2010 the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) published two papers on housing and young people. The first is a young people's charter¹⁸ on housing which summarises evidence from four projects led by young people aged under 30 across the UK examining their peers' experiences, housing choices and hopes for the future. The charter sets out the changes young people feel would help them make the right housing choices. Key points in the charter include:

- Home was a crucial concept for young people. For many it was synonymous with their family. The care, support and security of family were crucial to a smooth transition from living with parents to living independently;
- Young people saw independent living as a challenging but rewarding process, with benefits in terms of personal freedom and growing confidence;
- There was a clear divergence in housing aspirations. Many young people aspired to own their own home. Some wanted social rented housing. This was usually in lieu of family support;
- Few young people had achieved home ownership; and
- Information, advice and support were important for all young people. They called for more information across all housing options and a more flexible approach encompassing low-level support.

The second JRF paper¹⁹ focuses on the need for a new policy agenda in relation to young people and housing. The paper states that because young people are the most mobile sector of the population, it is more important to know where young people have lived and where they may move to next than it is to know the tenure in which they live

¹⁷ Communities and Local Government (March 2008) Statutory Homelessness in England: The experiences of families and 16-17 year olds, Homelessness Research Summary Number 7, 2008

¹⁸ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/young-people-housing-charter>

¹⁹ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/young-people-housing-need-new-agenda>

at any given moment. Understanding the nature of this 'pathway' is essential to forming better policy to support people making their first housing decisions.

Key points in the paper include:

- Young people are not a homogenous population and it cannot be assumed that as a group they are marginalised in the housing market;
- The policy framework tends to overlook the risks people take when making their first housing decisions;
- Unhelpful value judgements are routinely attached to tenure, and are a substantial obstacle for young people negotiating the housing market;
- There is no ideal outcome in terms of a single tenure being a universally appropriate end objective. For young people, a successful housing pathway is one which contains no extended period of catastrophic collapse which puts education, employment and emotional relationships on hold; and
- Policy-makers have overlooked the extreme housing need of young people at the very bottom of the market, who lack the basics of secure and affordable shelter.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has also published research evidence²⁰ which analyses issues relevant to housing provision for disabled children and describes the views of families themselves. The following messages are highlighted:

- Families with a disabled child are a disadvantaged group in relation to housing;
- Families with a disabled child have varied and often multiple needs;
- Some families with a disabled child are especially disadvantaged;
- Unsuitable housing has a negative impact on disabled children and their families;
- Achieving improvement in housing is not straightforward; and
- Information from professionals endorses families' reports.

The report reviews research which finds that the provision of suitable housing can have a very positive impact on the lives of disabled children and their families. However, studies also demonstrate that mistakes are possible and that these may be costly in terms of finance, effort and family stress. The report finds that families with a disabled child need input which helps them navigate their way through a complex and fragmented service system so they make informed choices. The report also notes that where they face multiple problems with housing, families may also need help to prioritise their housing needs so that they are as satisfied as possible with the outcome of any efforts at improvement.

The Salvation Army has published a report²¹ revealing alarming trends amongst homeless 18-25 year olds. The research includes analysis of interviews with nearly 1,000 people living in Salvation Army resettlement centres and hostels, which results in new findings about the underlying causes of homelessness and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army is concerned for a new generation of young homeless adults who appear to be self-medicating with drugs and alcohol in response to the environment, culture and society around them. Relationship breakdown and the lack of supportive relationships are cited as the main reasons for homelessness amongst the respondents (43%). However, the research also reveals that substance abuse and

²⁰ <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/housing-for-disabled-children-and-families>

²¹ www.salvationarmy.org.uk/seeds

mental health needs play a bigger role in drawing people into homelessness and social exclusion than those interviewed are prepared to recognise.

Key findings include:

- Almost all (94%) 18-25 year-olds felt they were neglected in childhood, compared to just under a third (30%) of the total sample and less than a quarter (23%) of respondents aged 56 years and over.
- More than two thirds of the 18-25 age group were raised in non-traditional families (73%) compared to a third (33%) in the 45–55 age group.
- Those who had poor relationships with their parents during childhood (31% with their mother, or 45% with their father) were likely to have been homeless as children. Just under half (45%) of the 18-25 age group were homeless at some point in their childhood. This figure falls with each successive age group.
- About one fifth (21%) of all respondents in The Seeds of Exclusion 2009 linked their homelessness to drug misuse, and a smaller number to problem drinking (16%). However, clinical assessment showed that 80% had drug and/or alcohol misuse problems, though only a quarter were using support services for their addiction. More than half of respondents aged from 18 to 45 years had a drug dependency and this peaked in the 26-35 age-group, at 67%.
- Almost three-quarters of respondents (74%) had multiple psychological problems, such as a post traumatic stress, a high suicide risk, and drug and alcohol dependency, and this was highest in the 18-25 age group (51%).

In December 2010 Centrepont published a report²² looking at the trends in homeless young people's support needs. The research found that:

- Youth homelessness has many causes and takes many forms, including sofa surfing and unfit housing, as well as rough sleeping;
- Homeless young people have a range of complex needs that prevent them from progressing into work and independent living;
- Many of these needs interrelate, causing a complex web of disadvantage. For example, mental health problems and experiences of care increase young people's chances of using illegal drugs and having a history of offending; and
- Young people need extra support to address these needs, but if they receive this they can make great strides. For example, the proportion of young people being supported by Centrepont that are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is a third lower than the proportion who first access Centrepont's services.

Case studies

A number of case studies profile the range of existing initiatives and examples of good practice in the children and young people's voluntary sector:

Action for Children – Bayswater Families Centre

Action for Children's Bayswater Families Centre provides a holistic range of family support services to children and their families living in temporary accommodation and to families who are street homeless or who are about to be evicted from their accommodation in the London Borough of Westminster.

The aims of the Centre include helping families to avoid homelessness; retain

²² <http://www.centrepont.org.uk/be-informed/publications/research-reports/the-changing-face-of-youth-homelessness?searchterm=the+changing+face+of>

tenancies; deal with the consequences of living in unsuitable accommodation; and maximise family income through assistance with benefits and debt issues.

The Bayswater project operates an open door policy, which means its services and staff are available to anyone who needs help.

Interventions and support provided by staff at the Centre have considerable positive impacts on both the mental health and overall stability of whole families. This includes preventing repeat homelessness; reducing debt, poverty and disruption to education; and avoiding the loss of family support networks.

The clients who use the Centre include:

- Families who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homelessness;
- Families in temporary accommodation in the borough of Westminster or out of borough;
- Families in short term accommodation including those staying with relatives and friends or those in unsuitable private rented accommodation (such as overcrowded housing or housing that is in disrepair); and
- Previously homeless families who have been re-housed. These clients can continue to receive re-settlement support for up to three months after moving out of the area or into local settled accommodation.

The Centre provides numerous services and support for children and families including:

- An early intervention schools outreach team. The purpose of this work is to reach families before they get into difficulties such as eviction. Through the school outreach work the Centre can help retain tenancies and prevent children having to leave school, their homes and friends. The Centre currently works with 12 schools, three nurseries and one community setting to carry out this work;
- A weekly homework club where a qualified teacher assists children from overcrowded homes or those living in homeless hotels or hostels. Children in overcrowded accommodation often find it very difficult to complete homework due to lack of space and privacy which can lead to low achievement and low self-esteem;
- An Advice Team that provides a three day a week duty service which offers advice, advocacy and information on welfare benefits and housing. Much of the work is crisis bases and staff are experienced in dealing with emergencies and complex issues around housing;
- An art therapy project which offers emotional and therapeutic support to 5-13 year old children living or attending schools in Westminster, particularly those facing housing difficulties; and
- Assistance for families with physical housing needs, for example support to improve a property if it is in disrepair or infested.

Howgill Family Centre

Howgill Family Centre has been working with families living in disadvantaged areas of West Cumbria for over 30 years offering a range of outreach and home visiting services to vulnerable families in need or crisis, through intensive work by multi-disciplinary teams and trained volunteers.

Howgill Family Centre identified that some of the families it worked with were at risk of homelessness resulting from landlords terminating tenancies due to neglect of properties. The Centre also recognised that some children's and families' living conditions posed a significant risk in terms of health, aspiration and emotional wellbeing.

The Centre therefore piloted a project to address the material needs of families through a practitioner-led grants based programme to effect improvements, coupled with intensive home-based support. This consisted of providing families with cleaning resources and help with DIY tasks to keep properties well-maintained, as well as liaison work with landlords to help negotiate any issues involving tenancy.

Following the successful piloting of this work through the Centre's self-generated funds, the work has been further developed in partnership with Home Group, the principal social landlord in the area. This preventative work is now funded for three years and builds upon previous partnership work between local organisations addressing community development, community asset improvements and work with young people at risk.

The aims of the project are:

- To support families at risk of losing their tenancy because of unacceptable household conditions;
- To support families where household conditions pose a risk to the well-being of children living there;
- To provide contracted cleaning support in the initial stages to recover the house/garden to a manageable condition;
- To provide ongoing support to implement household management routines jointly developed with the family;
- To monitor progress and withdraw when the household is satisfactorily managed on an ongoing and sustained basis; and
- To re-engage if circumstances alter and conditions begin to deteriorate in order to re-stabilise the management of the household.

This preventative work ultimately helps avoid homelessness for families already vulnerable through other factors. Evaluation of this work is ongoing and learning and could be rolled-out in other areas.

The Foyer Federation

The Foyer Federation was established in 1992, alongside the first five Foyers. Since then, the Foyer network has grown rapidly and now operates in over 130 urban and rural communities across the UK. Integrated learning and accommodation centres, referred to as Foyers, support up to 10,000 vulnerable homeless young people every year. Each Foyer is developed to meet needs in the local area with the size and range of services varying according to what other services are available.

At the heart of the Foyer approach lies a 'something for something' deal, a formal contract between the young person and the Foyer. In exchange for services that are tailored to their needs, all young people living in Foyers are expected to actively engage in their own development and make a positive contribution to their local community. The nature of this exchange depends very much on the individual, where they have come from, the barriers they are facing and their aspirations for the future.

It often means picking up the threads of education, developing skills for independence and encouraging greater resilience to overcome barriers. It can also mean rebuilding family relationships, overcoming mental health issues or developing stronger self confidence and self belief. Here are some personal stories demonstrating the difference that Foyer's support to young people can make.

Laura Farage, Swindon Foyer Resident

"The Foyer has helped me believe in myself, my family never believed in me and without the Foyer I'd never have carried on at college or thought about applying for university which is what I'm going to do next." says 20 year old Swindon Foyer resident Laura Farage. Laura's currently studying at Swindon College for a BTEC Level 3 in Media makeup. She has lived at the Foyer for the past six months and with the help of her support worker Amanda, has been planning her next steps. "Amanda helps me look at what where I want to go next, and I get advice and lots of guidance and support" says Laura. With the help of staff, she has been working towards her Learning Power Award (LPA) at the Foyer. Laura chose modules to help develop time management, confidence and money management skills. Laura decided to put these into practical use at the Foyer by taking part in a fundraising live music event for Swindon Young Carers.

Robert Craddick, Rugeley, Foyer Resident

"I was appointed as a volunteer co-ordinator at my Foyer. I am amazed at myself and how far I have come. My confidence has improved no end; my self esteem has greatly improved. I have a lot of ambition, drive and ultimately the desire to better myself which I never had before I came here."

Shoya, ex Enfield Foyer Resident

"Whilst volunteering at Enfield Foyer as a Volunteer Rep I gained the confidence to tackle my A Levels, studying English Literature, Business Studies and ICT. Since moving into Enfield Foyer I regularly met with the Education and Training Co-ordinator who pointed me in the right direction. She helped me to start a 'Fit for work' programme that helps with CV writing, filling application forms, doing presentations and covering letters."

Shelter – Keys to the future

Shelter's Keys to the Future Gloucestershire project was established in June 2007 to provide peer education that reaches and engages young people about issues relating to housing and homelessness.

Through the project, Peer Educators - young people who have experienced homelessness themselves - are trained by the project to take their stories into a wide range of settings including schools, youth centres and single issues groups to inform their peers about the detrimental effects of homelessness. The project was established to try to reduce some of the unrealistic expectations that many 16 and 17 year olds had in relation to leaving home and housing issues in the Gloucestershire area.

The project's main aims are to:

- Deliver peer education sessions to 6,000 young people in Gloucestershire - the sessions are designed for school-aged children to learn to avoid the pitfalls that can await young people leaving home and to challenge some of the stereotypes associated with homeless people;
- Deliver peer support to 250 recipients of the sessions who contact the project for further advice and support on housing and homelessness; and
- Support and train 20 volunteer Peer Educators aged 16-25 years. The Peer Educators have the opportunity to further their own education by studying for a BTEC or NVQ in Peer Education.

The peer education sessions are primarily carried out in local secondary schools in classroom based sessions of up to 30 pupils. However, Peer Educators also deliver sessions to larger groups including school assemblies and year groups. The sessions are targeted mainly at pupils in years 10 and 11. However, sessions have also taken place with younger year groups as the need arises. The peer education sessions fit into the National Curriculum's citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and financial capability targets.

National research evidences that some groups of young people are more at risk of homelessness than others, such as care leavers, young offenders, black and minority ethnic (BME) groups, young carers, those excluded from education and those not in employment or training. The project has sought to target its services in a range of other relevant settings that predominantly include these groups of young people, such as Pupil Referral Units, care homes, young offenders' units and single issue youth groups.

4. Conclusion

There has been a raft of government initiatives and legislation in recent years that has introduced many measures aimed at preventing children, young people and families from becoming homeless and ensuring they are provided with access to suitable housing. This is an on-going area of policymaking that will continue to pose a challenge to the Government, particularly in a period of economic recession and public spending cuts.

The current recession, coupled with rising costs in utility bills and increasing levels of unemployment, is likely to create more pressure on voluntary sector services, as more young people and families will be in need of a range of services relating to housing. It is therefore imperative that the children and young people's voluntary and community sector (CYPVCS) is able to continue providing services to children, young people and families facing homelessness. Together with statutory partners, CYPVCS organisations should be instrumental in developing preventative strategies and services to minimise the possibilities of young people and families falling into housing difficulties. The establishment of children's centres is an example of where housing advice and information, as well as a whole host of other services can be made easily accessible to parents.

Finally, it is important that the CYPVCS is able to get its voice heard by both central and local government and make a meaningful contribution to the design, implementation and evaluation of government's activities and initiatives both locally and nationally in relation to housing and homelessness. This is crucial as often national policy relies heavily on local implementation and effective partnership working.

5. Resources

Centre for Housing Policy
www.york.ac.uk/inst/chp

Centrepoint
www.centrepont.org.uk

Chartered Institute of Housing
www.cih.org

Communities and Local Government
www.communities.gov.uk

Homeless Link
www.homeless.org.uk

Housing Corporation
www.housingcorp.gov.uk

Housing Justice
www.housingjustice.org.uk

Housing Rights Service
www.housingrights.org.uk

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
www.jrf.org.uk

National Housing Federation
www.housing.org.uk

National Youth Homelessness Scheme
www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness

Shelter
www.shelter.org.uk

6. Other briefings

- Briefing 1** Knife, gun and gang crime
- Briefing 2** The Government's Social Exclusion Agenda
- Briefing 3** Access to Services in Rural Areas
- Briefing 4** Public Service Delivery
- Briefing 5** Community Cohesion
- Briefing 6** Local Government Reform
- Briefing 7** Place-shaping
- Briefing 8** The Comprehensive Spending Review
- Briefing 9** Rural migrant children, families and young people
- Briefing 10** Gang, Gun and Knife Crime: Seeking Solutions (Part 2)
- Briefing 11** Ministry of Justice Third Sector Strategy
- Briefing 12** The Youth Crime Action Plan
- Briefing 13** Communities in control: real people, real power
- Briefing 14** 2012 Olympic Legacy
- Briefing 15** The 2008 Drug Strategy
- Briefing 16** Environment
- Briefing 17** Children, young people and disability

- Briefing 18** Small Grants Programme
- Briefing 19** Healthy Lives, Brighter Futures
- Briefing 20** Financial capability
- Briefing 21** Education, employment and training
- Briefing 22** Health and well-being: an overview
- Briefing 23** Community Empowerment
- Briefing 24** Housing and homelessness
- Briefing 25** Small Grants Programme (2)

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Free hard copies are also available to order. Please contact Sophie Griffiths, Children England's Policy and Information Officer on 020 7833 3319 or email sophie@childrenengland.org.uk or Rhiannon Jones, NCVYS's Information and Website Officer on 020 7278 1041 or email rhiannon@ncvys.org.uk.