

Full report



Young &

Homeless 2018



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Produced by

The Homeless Link Research Team, April 2018

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Introduction

Background

Young people with experiences of homelessness are one of the most vulnerable groups in society and continue to make up approximately half of the people accessing homelessness services in England.¹ For the past seven years, Homeless Link's national study on youth homelessness has provided crucial evidence to inform policy and practice.² By exploring key trends in youth homelessness and the availability and nature of accommodation options and support, this sixth edition of our *Young and Homeless* report makes an important contribution to the evidence base on youth homelessness in England.

Young people in England today face numerous challenges, which can potentially impact their transition to independence and adulthood, such as a disproportional risk of poverty and destitution, reductions in welfare benefit entitlements, and discrimination in the housing and labour markets.³ Certain young people may be especially affected by these factors and, therefore, particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Some examples are care leavers, young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and those unable to remain with their family and/or primary caregiver.⁴ Within this challenging context, it is particularly important that we understand how to respond to youth homelessness and aim to prevent it.

This report outlines the findings from surveys with 188 homelessness services and local authorities across England and in-depth interviews with 25 young people who have experienced homelessness. The report explores the nature and causes of youth homelessness, the available support and best practice, and provides critical evidence to inform local and national government responses. It includes findings on several under-researched areas, such as factors affecting family relationship breakdown, mediation services, and young women's experiences.

A challenging context

Young people's housing options have changed significantly in recent years. Young people face significant barriers to owner occupation, and within a constrained social rented sector are now more likely to rely on the private rented sector (PRS) for accommodation. However, accessing the PRS can be particularly difficult for young people due to factors such as age-related discrimination from landlords who may prefer older tenants, and lower rates of Housing Benefit entitlements. When living within the PRS, young people face higher risks of poverty, lower security of tenure and increasing rent levels.⁵

¹ Homeless Link (2017) Support for single homeless people in England: Annual review 2017, Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england>

² All Young and Homeless research reports are available on our website: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research>

³ FEANTSA (2017) Locked out: Housing solutions for vulnerable young people transitioning to independence, Available at: <http://www.feantsa.org/download/report-chloe-eng5472656428791867789.pdf>

⁴ Ibid FEANTSA (2017)

⁵ Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth homelessness in the UK: A review for The OVO Foundation, Available at: <https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/9258335>

Young people have been disproportionately impacted by welfare benefit reforms, with successive UK governments having reduced young people's entitlements to social security.⁶ For example, young people's Housing Benefit entitlement is restricted to the cost of a renting a single room in a shared house, and young people also receive a lower rate of income support within Jobseeker's Allowance and Universal Credit. Research also suggests that, compared to older claimants, young people are at a higher risk of benefits sanctions.⁷

Employment plays a key role in impacting young people's housing options. The latest statistics indicate that unemployment rates for 16-24 year olds currently stand at approximately 12%.⁸ Although this has fallen in recent years, these figures remain higher than the unemployment rate for other working age people. In addition, young people can often be employed in jobs that are low paid, insecure and present few opportunities for career development.⁹

Young people also face high risks of homelessness, poverty and destitution. Although the rate of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, Homeless Link's 2017 *Annual Review: Support for Single Homeless People in England*, indicates that roughly half of the individuals who access homelessness services in England are between the ages of 18-24.¹⁰ Large-scale survey data suggests that, compared to adults, young people in the UK are three times more likely to have experienced homelessness over the past five years.¹¹ In light of these disproportional risks and challenges faced by young people, it is imperative that both the homelessness sector and local and national government understand how to effectively prevent and address youth homelessness.

Responding to youth homelessness

Since the causes, experiences and consequences of youth homelessness often differ from those experienced by adults, the policy and practice responses should also be different.¹² The homelessness sector in England has a relatively high proportion of young person services providing support that is tailored to the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹³ These services do, however, operate within a challenging funding climate, with 47% of accommodation providers who responded to Homeless Link's *Annual Review* reporting an income reduction from the previous year.¹⁴

⁶ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

⁷ Batty, E., Beatty, C., Casey, R., Foden, M., McCarthy, L. and Reeve, K. (2015) *Homeless people's experiences of welfare conditionality and benefit sanctions*, Available at: <https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/benefits-and-employment/homeless-people-s-experiences-of-welfare-conditionality-and-benefit-sanctions-2015/>

⁸ House of Commons (2018) Youth unemployment statistics, Available at: <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN05871>

⁹ D'Arcy, C. (2017) *Low Pay Britain 2017*, Resolution Foundation Report, Available at: <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/10/Low-Pay-Britain-2017.pdf>

¹⁰ Homeless Link (2017) *Support for single homeless people in England: Annual review 2017*, Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england>

¹¹ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

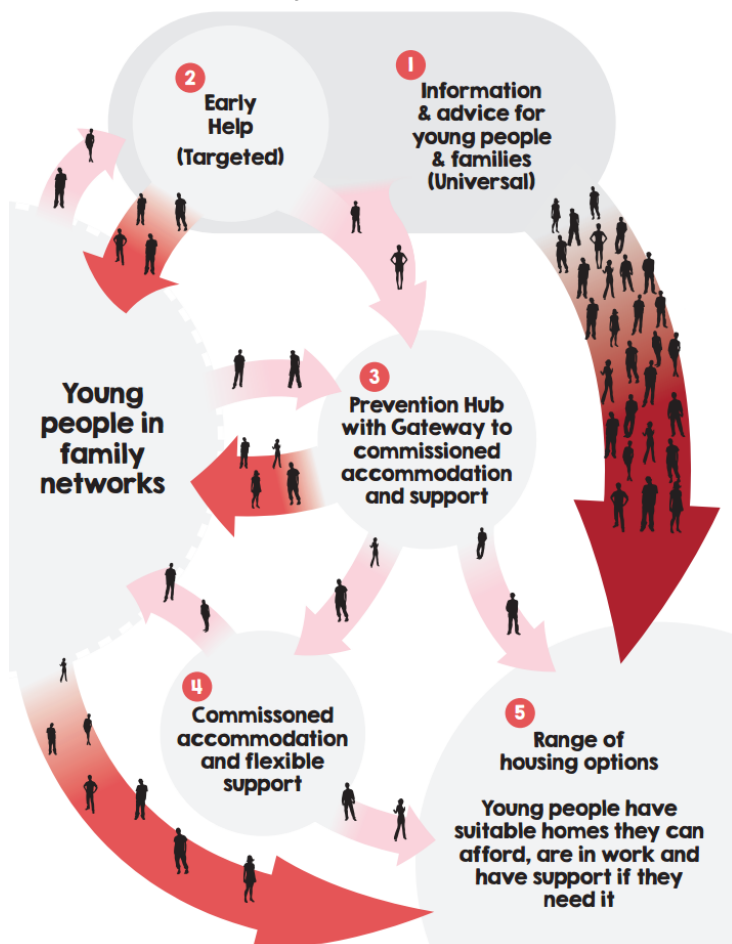
¹² FEANTSA (2017) *Locked out: Housing solutions for vulnerable young people transitioning to independence*, Available at: <http://www.feantsa.org/download/report-chloe-eng5472656428791867789.pdf>

¹³ Ibid 2017 Annual Review

¹⁴ Ibid 2017 Annual Review

As highlighted in our previous *Young and Homeless* reports,¹⁵ England has seen improvements in some policy and service responses to youth homelessness – particularly in regard to prevention and cooperation between local authorities and homelessness services. This is most clearly encapsulated in the widespread adoption of the Positive Pathway model, which is a national framework developed by the charity St Basils and the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2012 to help local authorities more effectively prevent and respond to youth homelessness.

The Positive Pathway Model¹⁶



The Positive Pathway brings together evidence of good practice and ‘what works’ in youth homelessness, and outlines how agencies should work together in an integrated way. It aims both to prevent homelessness and to promote a range of housing options to ensure a planned move for young people leaving care or the family home. A recent evaluation of the Positive Pathway Model, demonstrates that its implementation results in improvements in practice and service provision, better use of resources and better outcomes for young people.¹⁷

¹⁶St Basil’s (2015) *Developing Positive Pathways to Adulthood*, Available at: http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf

¹⁷ Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) *The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact*, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ourexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

In addition, in recent years there have been several national programmes aimed at reducing youth homelessness. These include investment from national government via the Fair Chance Fund to support young homeless people with complex needs, and funding via its Platform for Life programme to develop low-rent accommodation for young people aged 18 to 24 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This research project

For the past seven years, Homeless Link's Young and Homeless research has provided essential evidence on youth homelessness trends among 16-24 year-olds, available provision and the impact of policy changes, for example, welfare reform. The findings featured in this report are based on three key data sources.

1) A self-completed online survey from 109 homelessness service providers and 79 local authorities¹⁸

An online survey was sent to 682 homelessness service providers¹⁹ and 353 local authorities throughout England, requesting statistical information on young people accessing their services, and their professional opinion on the nature and impact of current trends over the past year (September 2016–August 2017).²⁰ 81% of homelessness service providers responded in relation to a specific service, 19% responded on behalf of a whole organisation.

Data was analysed using Excel and the open text comments were thematically analysed and used as supporting evidence.

2) Semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 25 young people with experiences of homelessness

17 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups with young people at three organisations who participated in the research, provided further insight into topics addressed in the survey.²¹ The organisations all provide supported accommodation to young people and are located in three different regions in England. The interview questions were designed in collaboration with the St Basils National Youth Voice (see below).

3) Four case studies of best practice

The case studies highlight effective services across the country that are making a difference for young people, with a focus on promoting positive practice and encouraging other services to learn from them. Information was gathered through documentary evidence, service visits and telephone interviews with staff.

A participatory approach

The National Youth Voice (formerly the National Youth Reference Group), is organised by the charity St Basils, and consists of young people between the ages of 16-25 who have experienced homelessness. Homeless Link consulted with the Youth Voice during the design and development of the project. Advisors scrutinised the surveys, designed interview questions and provided valuable insight into key under-researched

¹⁸ Local authority response rate (22%), Homelessness service providers response rate (16%)

¹⁹ Approximately two-thirds of the sample cater specifically to young people, the remainder identified young people as a client group supported by their service.

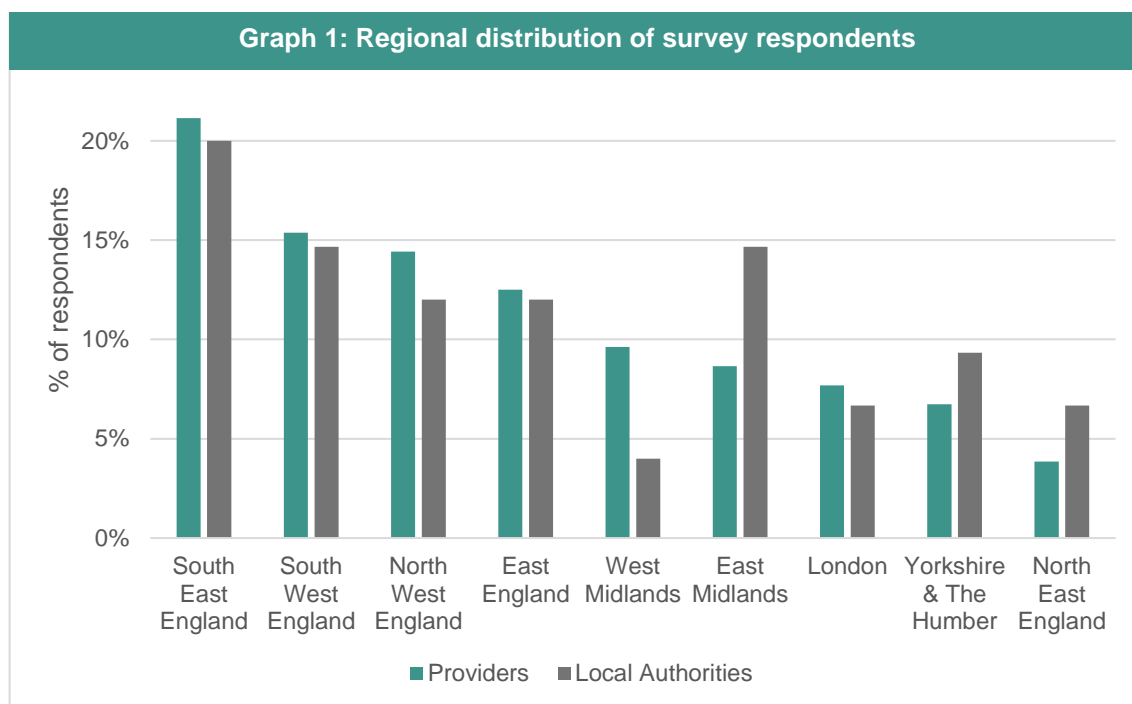
²⁰ Each survey was piloted with two local authorities and two providers.

²¹ The sample include 16 females and 9 males, aged between 18-25. Four participants had moved on from the service at the time of the interview.

study areas.²² By incorporating this feedback into the research design, we aimed to ensure that the findings addressed the issues which most concerned young people. Following telephone consultations based on the research findings, the Youth Voice also provided practical recommendations for policy makers and practitioners (see pages 59-61). To further ensure this study's relevance to the current context, a roundtable with leading youth homelessness organisations informed the re-drafting of questionnaires, along with the focus group and interview schedules.

Distribution of survey respondents

Within survey responses, there was good coverage from all English regions, albeit with a slight over-representation in the South of England and slight under-representation in the North East and West Midlands.



Accuracy of statistical data

Certain questions ask for 'snapshots' of data relating to records of young people accessing their service in a single month or over the past year. Within different services, amounts and methods of data collection tend to vary, and some data may therefore be based on informed estimates rather than exact figures (Table 1).

Table 1: When completing this survey, have you provided exact figures, best estimates, or a mix of both?	
	% of respondents
All exact figures	19%
Best estimates	29%
A mix of both	53%

²² Harris, J. (2017) How young people with experiences of homelessness inform our research (online blog), Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2017/jun/30/how-young-people-with-experiences-of-homelessness-inform-our-research>

Chapter 1. Youth homelessness trends

Varying definitions of homelessness and youth, the lack of a single approach in assessing the number of young homeless people in England, and the 'hidden' nature of many homeless people's experiences, makes quantifying youth homelessness particularly challenging. This chapter explores recent trends in youth homelessness across three key measures: statutory youth homelessness, non-statutory youth homelessness, and rough sleeping.

Key findings

- While youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, the respondents report that the situation has not improved and current levels have either increased or remained the same.
- Around 40% of local authorities reported that the scale of youth homelessness had increased.
- Over half (55%) of responding homelessness services reported an increase in demand.
- 45% of providers and local authorities believed there had been an increase in young men sleeping rough in their local area.
- Respondents identified a lack of affordable housing, a lack of supported accommodation, and welfare benefit reform as causing increases in youth homelessness.

Statutory youth homelessness

The number of young people (aged 18-24) that were considered to be statutory homeless by their local authority has fallen slightly over the past two years, and in October-December 2017 stood at 2,830. This figure is 8% lower than the same period in 2016.²³

Statutory homelessness refers to the number of households (i.e. individuals or couples) who were found eligible for help under relevant homelessness legislation,²⁴ and generally form the basis for official statistics. The level of statutory acceptances, however, only partially represents the scale of youth homelessness, as many young people will be considered not to be in priority need.

Also, many people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness do not approach their local authority for help for a number of reasons, such as being unaware of their housing rights and entitlements, or due to certain expectations of the response they might receive.²⁵ In addition, young people may receive assistance from their local authorities via prevention and relief initiatives without having had a formal homelessness assessment.²⁶ Prevention and relief statistics do not list an age breakdown, which makes it difficult to assess the extent to which these initiatives account for the reduction in statutory homelessness.

²³ Homeless Link's analysis of the statutory data is available at <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/homelessness-in-numbers/statutory-homelessness>

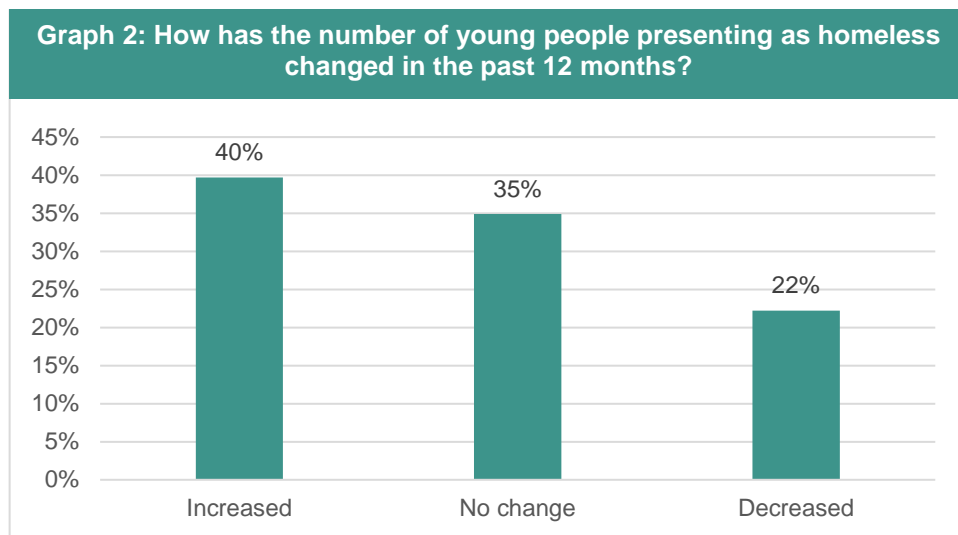
²⁴ People will be considered eligible for accommodation (also referred to as 'the main homelessness duty') by their local council when meeting the criteria of the Homelessness Act 2002: i) eligible for assistance; ii) homeless; iii) in priority need; and iv) not intentionally homeless.

²⁵ Robinson, D., & Coward, S. (2003). Hidden Homelessness: Your Place, Not Mine. Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/hidden-homelessness-your-place-not-mine.pdf>

²⁶ Prevention covers positive action taken by local authorities to provide assistance to people at risk of homelessness, relief involves actions to secure accommodation for households that have already become homeless.

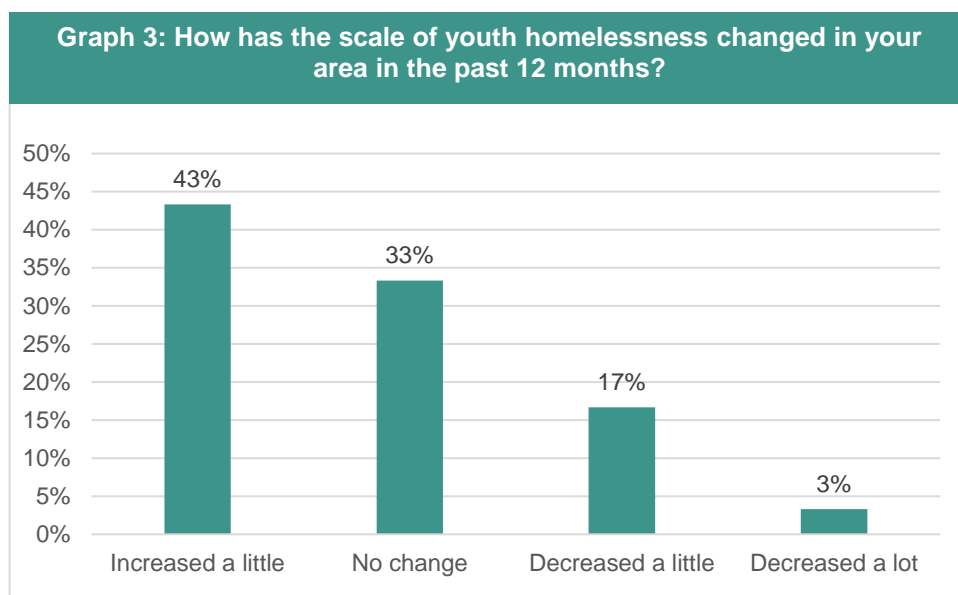
A significant number of young people who are homeless will therefore not be captured in these statutory statistics, and official estimates are likely to underestimate the scale of the youth homelessness in England.

Our survey explored local authority views on changing trends in youth homelessness over the past year. Local authorities were most likely to report that the number of young people presenting as homeless has increased (40%) or remained the same (35%) (Graph 2). As mentioned above, a proportion of young people presenting as homeless will not be considered as priority need, whilst others will be helped without making an official application and therefore will not be captured in official statistics.



N: 63

A similar pattern emerged in relation to the local authorities' views on changes in the scale of youth homelessness in their area over the past year, with most respondents reporting a slight increase (43%), or numbers remaining stable (33%) (Graph 3). No local authorities reported a large increase.



N: 60

While the number of young people accepted as statutory homeless has decreased slightly in recent years, survey findings suggest that the number of young people experiencing homelessness, and the number of young people presenting as homeless at their local authority, has increased a little or remained the same. These findings are consistent with a 2015 review of youth homelessness in the UK, suggesting that youth homelessness has remained stable or has increased slightly in recent years.²⁷

Explaining statutory trends

The open text responses indicate a degree of consensus among responding local authorities that the slight increase relates to structural drivers,²⁸ with a substantial proportion suggesting that these trends are associated with a lack of affordable housing and welfare benefit reforms. The responses suggest that even where strong prevention initiatives are in place. For example, following the adoption of the existing Positive Pathway Model, their success will be affected by wider structural economic and housing market factors:

The demand for housing services and homeless services has increased throughout the age range as options are so slim, more and more are struggling to afford a home to live in (Local authority respondent).

A robust young person pathway exists in our area, but with changes beyond the control of the pathway such as Universal Credit, then the numbers have increased a little (Local authority respondent).

A smaller number of local authorities reported a decrease in the scale of youth homelessness in their area (20%). These respondents reported that this reduction followed the adoption of a coordinated approach between local authorities, homelessness service providers and other agencies in order to prevent youth homelessness, as well as an expansion of existing accommodation options.

With the implementation of initiatives mentioned above, the consistent and coordinated response to youth homelessness means that more young people are prevented from becoming homeless - helped to return to family, or assisted into supported accommodation (Local authority respondent).

Non-statutory youth homelessness

The term non-statutory homelessness is often used to refer to young people supported by various temporary accommodation services. As there is no official national register of the number of people accessing these services, determining the scale of non-statutory homelessness is particularly challenging. However, existing research does clearly indicate that, compared to older people, young people in England are at a higher risk of homelessness:

- Our latest survey of homelessness services listed on the Homeless England database²⁹ showed that 44% of young people supported by accommodation projects are between the ages of 16 and 24.

²⁷ Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth homelessness in the UK: A review for The OVO Foundation, Available at: <https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/9258335>

²⁸ Structural factors include social and economic issues such as rising rents, unemployment, or housing shortages.

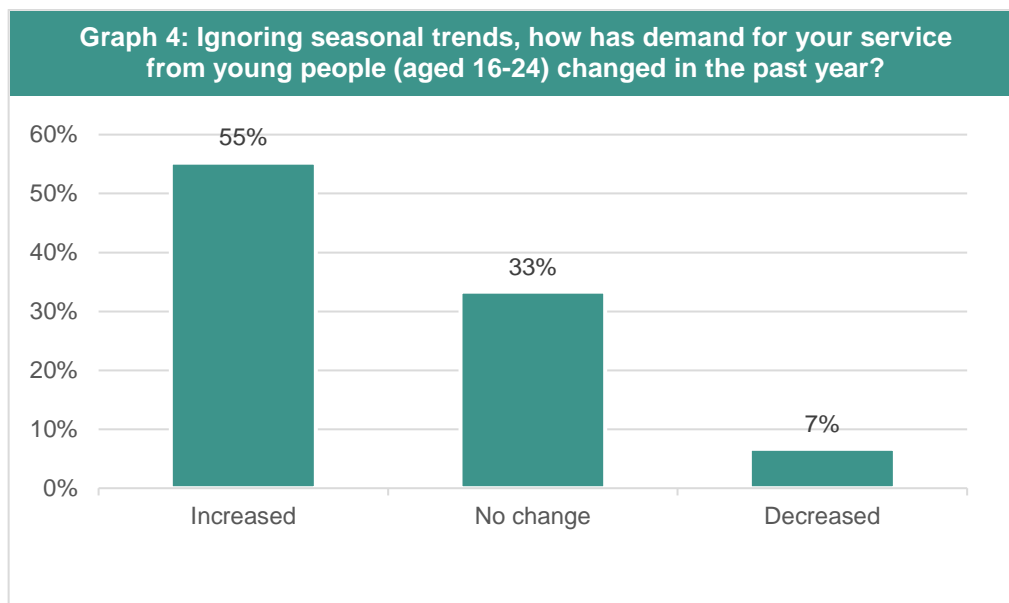
²⁹ The Homeless England database is a live online directory of homelessness services managed by Homeless Link and holds information on approximately 1,400 accommodation projects (this covers most services in England).

- Analysis of the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey data shows that, compared to other age groups, young people are more than three times as likely to have experienced homelessness in the last five years.³⁰

In 2015, it was estimated that, in the previous year, 83,000 young people had been in contact with homelessness services – a figure four times higher than those listed as statutory homeless within this time period.³¹ A recent estimate on the scale of homelessness among young people has been provided by Centrepoin’s Youth Homelessness Databank report, which collated Freedom of Request responses from 77% of councils across the country.³² The database provides information on the number of young people approaching their local authority for help, even if they were not defined as statutory homeless.

- The Youth Homelessness Databank estimates that 86,000 young people approached their local authority for help in 2016/17 because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness. This figure is likely to be an under-estimate of the scale of youth homelessness as it does not include people who have not approached their local authority for help.

Our survey responses indicate that many service providers supporting young homeless people are experiencing increased or continuing high levels of demand (Graph 4). Homeless Link’s 2017 *Annual Review* shows that accommodation services generally have limited spare capacity and often have to turn people down because of a lack of space.³³ There is generally a substantial excess of demand over supply within the homelessness sector, and even where demand has remained the same, it is often at a high level.



N Homelessness service providers: 105

³⁰ Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth homelessness in the UK: A review for The OVO Foundation, Available at: <https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/9258335>

³¹ Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S., & Udagawa, C. (2015) Estimating the Scale of Youth Homelessness in the UK. Available at: https://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/Estimating-the-scale-of-youth-homelessness-in-the-UK/Report/copy_of_Full-Report

³² Centepoint (2018) More than a number: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK

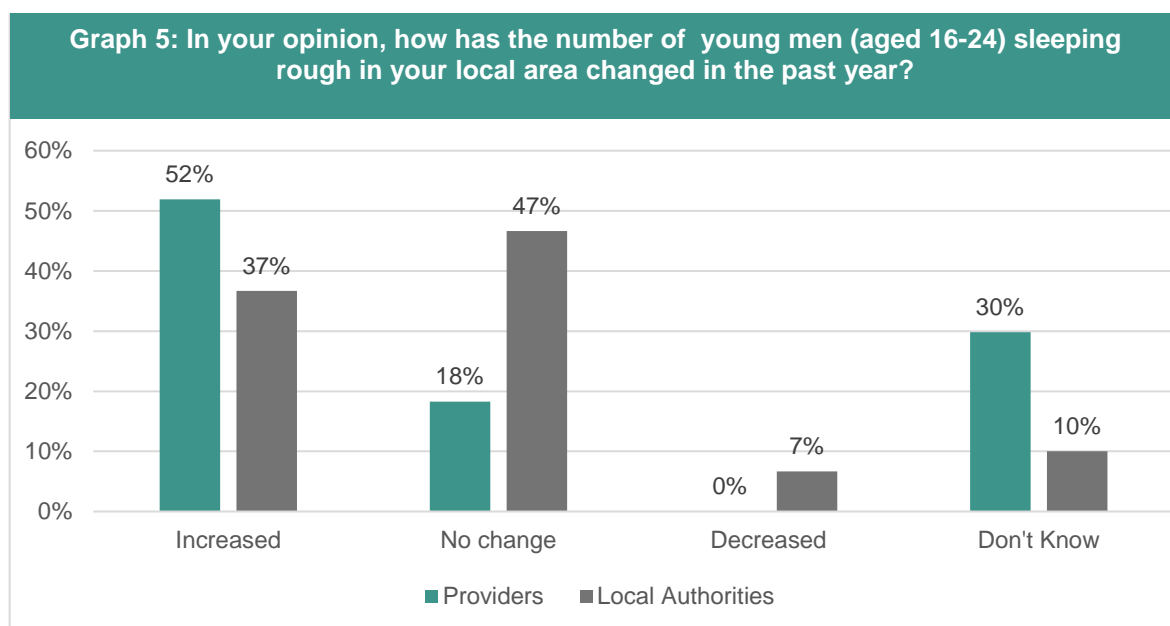
³³ Homeless Link (2017) *Support for single homeless people in England: Annual review 2017*, Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england>

These findings are not necessarily indicative of increased youth homelessness; the increased demand could be caused by other local services having closed down. These findings do, however, suggest that homelessness services supporting young people are operating within a challenging context of needing to meet increased or high levels of demand with increasingly constrained resources. Findings from Homeless Link's latest *Annual Review* show that 47% of responding accommodation providers experienced a reduction in income from the previous year³⁴.

Rough sleeping

Research has shown that young people will often stay in various temporary accommodation placements (e.g., sofa surfing with family or friends) prior to or instead of accessing support.³⁵ However, reflecting the upward trend in the scale of rough sleeping in England across all age groups, a recent analysis of the CHAIN database³⁶ indicates a sharp increase in the number of young people sleeping rough in London.³⁷

The findings from our survey further indicate an increase in the number of young people sleeping rough, with over half of the providers reporting an increase in the number of young men sleeping rough in their local area over the past year (graph 5). On average, 45% of survey respondents reported an increase in young men sleeping rough.



N: Homelessness service providers (104), Local Authorities (60)

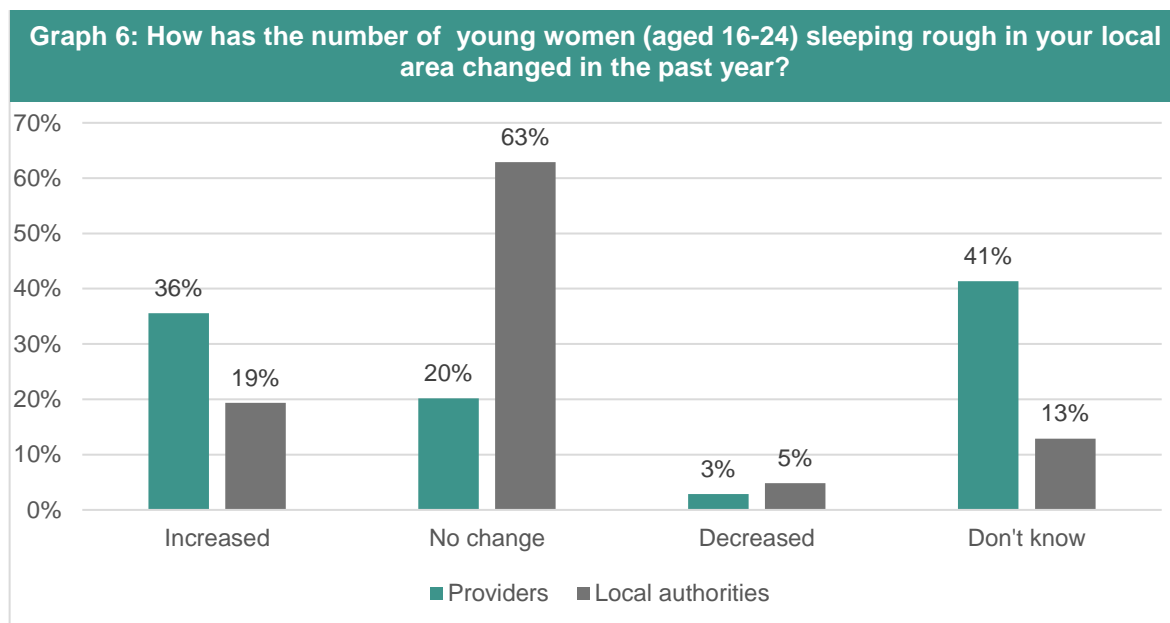
³⁴ Ibid 2017 Annual Review

³⁵ McCoy, S. (2018) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two. A quantitative exploration of young people's experience of temporary living, Available at: <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/sites/default/files/DANGER-ZONES-REPORT-FINAL-EMBARGOED-TILL-00.01AM-THURSDAY-22-MARCH-2018.pdf>

³⁶ The CHAIN database, managed by St Mungo's, captures information about people who sleep rough in London.

³⁷ Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth homelessness in the UK: A review for The OVO Foundation, available at: <https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/9258335>

The increase in rough sleeping was reported as higher among young men than young women (Graph 6). Due to their heightened vulnerability, women are more likely to avoid sleeping rough in the open. In other research, women have reported purposely remaining hidden while sleeping rough, and as a result are less likely to appear in official rough sleeping counts and estimates.³⁸ Many women are likely to be in ‘hidden homeless’ situations, which can involve sleeping on someone’s floor, remaining out of sight in squats, or staying in an abusive relationship due to a lack of alternative housing options.³⁹



N: Homelessness service providers (104), Local Authorities (62)

We interviewed two young men and three young women who had slept rough at some point, and one young woman had ended up staying with a stranger who approached on her on the street, with another reporting that at night she would usually not sleep but hide away in a car park.

At the time I was so cold and I didn't really care where I was at that point. I just said, "Yes." I went and stayed round his for the night. He was a genuinely really, really nice guy and he's still a really good friend of mine to this day. Now I'm thinking back to it and it's like anything could have happened if I'd gone back there and actually thought about it. I could have just said, "No," but at the time I was so desperate to be warm that I just said, "Yes," and went for it ... you take more risks when you're in vulnerable situations like that (Young person).

These stories illustrate how young women who are at risk of sleeping rough will often find themselves in a range of concealed and marginalised situations, whilst often taking significant risks to secure a place to stay, which in turn exposes them to further danger, trauma and abuse.⁴⁰ Current rough sleeping statistics are therefore likely to underestimate the number of women sleeping rough in England.

³⁸ St Mungo's (2014) Rebuilding Shattered Lives. The Final Report. Available at: https://rebuildingshatteredlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Rebuilding-Shattered-Lives_Final-Report.pdf

³⁹ Ibid St Mungo's (2014)

⁴⁰ Homeless Link (2017) Supporting women who are homeless. Briefing for homelessness services, Available at: https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Supporting%20women%20who%20are%20homeless%20March%202017_0.pdf

Drivers of rough sleeping

In the open text responses, homelessness service providers and local authorities offered a range of explanations for the increase in young people sleeping rough. Inadequate housing options and welfare benefit reforms were the most commonly cited reasons. A lack of affordable housing and emergency accommodation were identified as key drivers of youth homelessness and rough sleeping. Several respondents also highlighted a reduction or a continued lack of women-only provision within their area.

There is a limited amount of emergency direct access provision for females in the borough (Local authority respondent).

There has been closure of a number of women's refuges in the North East - and a lack of spaces in the replacement services. Universal Credit and increased use of sanctions is also playing a role as is the lack of provision of supported housing for women with mental health issues (Homelessness provider respondent).

Relationship breakdown was also cited as key factor in the increase of young people sleeping rough, with homelessness providers highlighting a lack of prevention and early intervention initiatives (see Chapter 3).

Social services not providing enough support to families to prevent family breakdown - children's services only reactive when crisis has already occurred not preventative when issues first arise (Homelessness provider respondent).

Although no homelessness providers reported a decrease in young men sleeping rough, a few local authorities did report a decrease, which they attributed to effective outreach and prevention services, alongside an expansion of emergency accommodation options.

This has been following assertive outreach service, implementation of multi-agency rough sleepers strategy, opening of Emergency Night shelter, implementation of Housing Protocol's (Homeless 16/17s) (Local authority respondent)

Chapter 2. Young homeless people: profile and support needs

Having a clear understanding of who may be most at risk of homelessness, can help to effectively target early intervention and prevention initiatives. This chapter explores the socio-demographic characteristics and risk factors associated with youth homelessness, and discusses young people's main support needs.

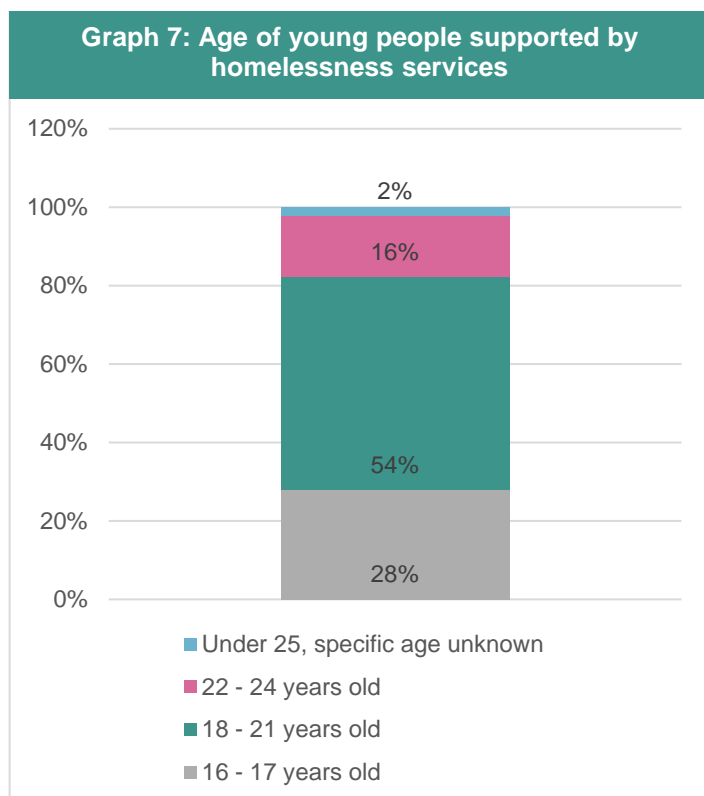
Key findings

- Young people who have experiences of the care system, are from BME groups and identify as LGBTQ+ face higher risks of homelessness.
- The top three support needs of young people reported by homelessness accommodation providers were not being in education, employment or training (44%), a lack of independent living skills (41%) and mental health problems (35%).
- In the interviews, young people identified isolation and loneliness as a key additional need.
- 83% of providers said the number of young people presenting with multiple and complex needs had increased in the last year due to limited capacity and resources in the homelessness sector, a lack of specialist mental health services and inadequate early intervention initiatives.

Socio-demographic characteristics and risk factors

Age

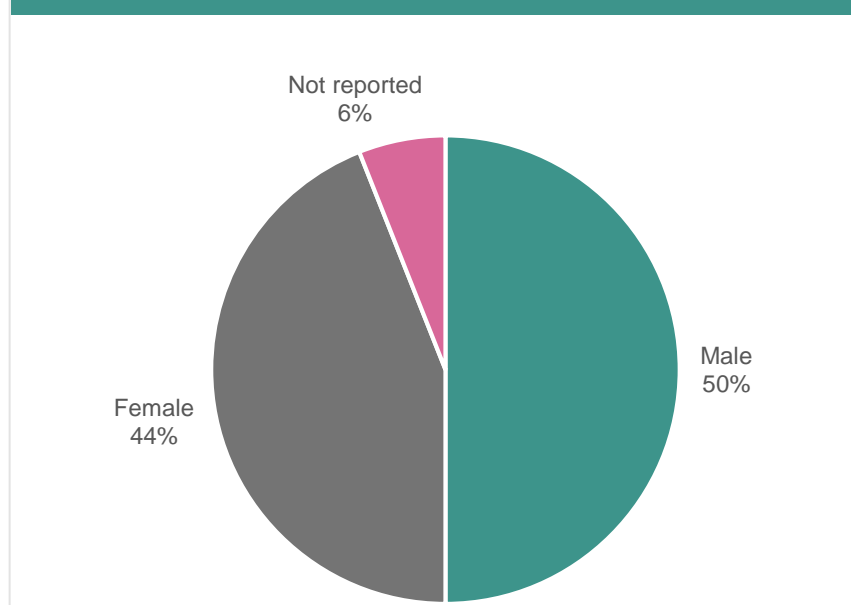
A total of 76 homelessness accommodation organisations provided statistical data for 4,981 young people. The findings show that a large proportion of young people within the responding services were between the ages of 18-21 (54%) (Graph 7).



Gender

Responding homelessness accommodation providers reported a fairly equal split between male and females accessing their services (Graph 7). Research has shown that women's experiences of homelessness are distinct to those of men. Violence, trauma, substance and domestic abuse are just some of the complex and interrelating problems contributing to women's homelessness. Some homelessness services are not adequately equipped to address these specific issues, and Homeless Link is currently working to support the homelessness sector to improve the help provided to women.⁴¹ Case study one is an example of a specialist service that seeks to understand and respond to the specific needs of women who are homeless.

Graph 8: Gender of young people supported by homelessness services



⁴¹ Homeless Link (2017) Supporting women who are homeless. Briefing for homelessness services, Available at: https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Supporting%20women%20who%20are%20homeless%20March%202017_0.pdf

Case study 1: Temporary supported accommodation service for women

Rainham House offers 11 self-contained flats for single women and women with children in Middlesbrough. The service is provided by North Star, a North East-based Housing Association that focuses on building homes and creating futures.

Rainham House offers a high standard of fully furnished accommodation, open and welcoming communal spaces, and a large allotment garden with play areas. Women accessing the service generally present with a range of vulnerabilities and support needs including homelessness, mental health problems and experiences of childhood trauma. Many of the women also have histories of either witnessing domestic violence as children or experiencing it within their own personal relationships. Staff report that these experiences significantly impact the women's self-esteem, confidence and mental health, and, in turn, hinder them from moving on from homelessness and achieving their goals.

The service focuses on promoting independence and supporting women in addressing their multiple needs by adopting a person-centred, transparent and flexible approach. By helping residents to develop positive support networks, life skills and resilience, the women are supported to move on from the service, as well as with their lives. Taking the time to build positive and trusting relationships with residents is key within this process.

Interviews with residents show that women particularly value the understanding and flexible approach adopted by staff, as well as their commitment to working constructively with people's behaviours:

Oh, my support worker was brilliant, really, really good. Any little problem she would be straight there to sit and talk to you and make sure that every choice you made was the right one and stuff. And if you were struggling she'd be straight on the phone to try and help you all the way, like [linking] in other services and stuff. But she would just leave you as well if she knew that's what you needed. She was good, and she would listen. She would try and understand from your point of view and stuff, where you were coming from (Former resident).

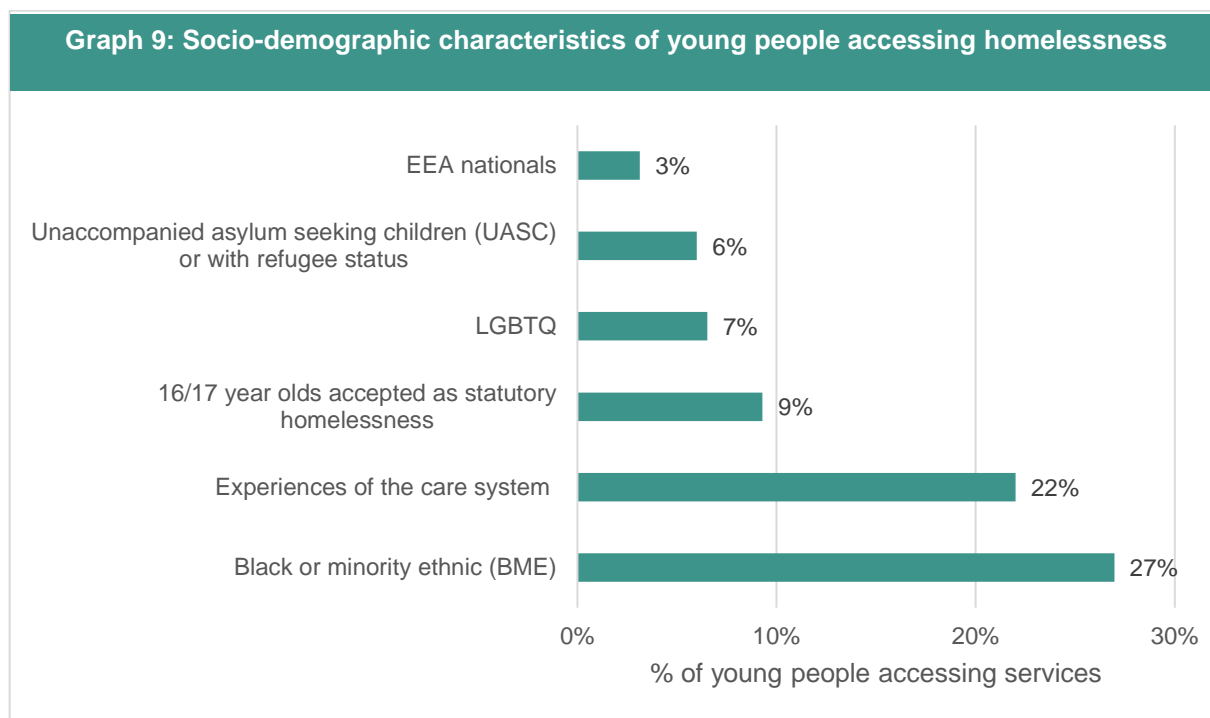
Rainham House excels at multi-agency working, and has built strong relationships with various local statutory and voluntary organisations. This process is facilitated by the monthly one-hour "tea and toast" drop-in sessions held at the service, providing local organisations an opportunity for networking, information sharing and the development of partnerships. Inter-agency collaboration allows a holistic approach to be adopted in addressing the needs of residents, and the skills and services of external partners are brought in to address individual needs as they arise.

The success of the service in ending homelessness is demonstrated by its high rates of positive move-on: 83% in 2016/2017. Since the service opened in 2011, a total of 64 women have moved on positively. Interviews with staff and residents suggest that the service also performs particularly well with "softer outcomes" such as helping the women gain confidence, self-esteem, and emotional wellbeing, which in turn greatly assists them in achieving their goals and aspirations:

To get in a place like this, you're ending a lot of shit, but you're also moving on. You move in here, you've got to deal with not just your past, but what you want to do, where you want to go ... I've spent maybe 26 years being angry and stressed out and horrible and trying to work out all my demons and now I'm 26 and I've got a little dream coming on, and for someone that doesn't do dreams, I'm doing alright (Former resident).

Profile of young people

Research has shown that certain groups of young people are at increased risk of homelessness (graph 9). This information can be used to inform and target prevention initiatives.



Existing literature shows that BME groups are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness, which is also reflected in this survey. Although there is little evidence on the impact of ethnicity on people's experiences of homelessness, one explanation suggests the higher risk could to some extent be attributed to the higher rates of socio-economic disadvantage experienced by BME groups.⁴²

A wide body of research shows care leavers to also be at a heightened risk of homelessness, which is reflected in this study's findings. In another study, one third of care leavers became homeless within the first two years of leaving care, and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives.⁴³ The role of the statutory care system within young homeless people's experiences is explored further on page 29 this report.

The number of young people reported to be LGBTQ+ is likely to be significantly underestimated, as young people may choose not to disclose their sexuality or gender identity to services. Other research suggests that LGBTQ+ comprise 24% of the 83,000 young people who were estimated to be experiencing homelessness in 2015/16.⁴⁴

⁴² Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth homelessness in the UK: A review for The OVO Foundation, Available at: <https://pureapps2.hw.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/9258335>

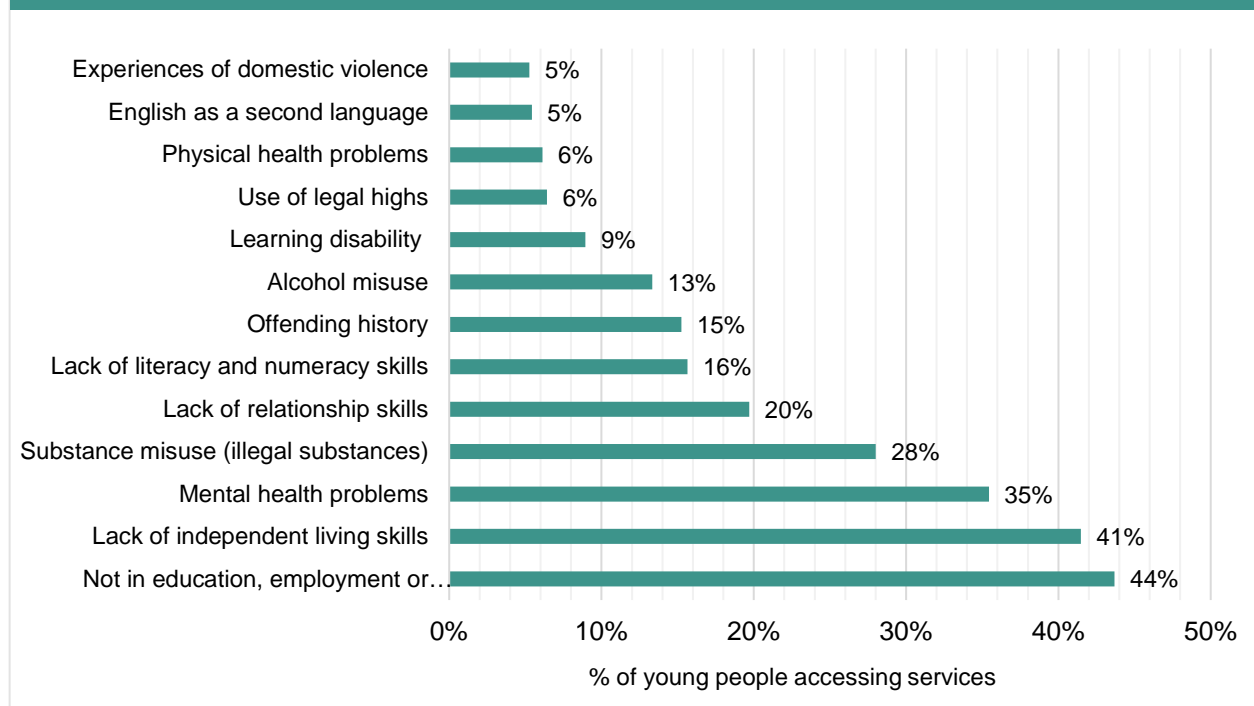
⁴³ National Audit Office (2015) Care leavers' transition to adulthood. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Care-leavers-transition-to-adulthood.pdf>

⁴⁴ TUC (2016) Housing, homelessness and young LGBT people. Solutions to a crisis for LGBT youth, Available at: https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Housing%20policy_0.pdf

Support needs

Many young people who experience or are at risk of homelessness will have other needs outside their immediate need for housing (Graph 10), and therefore require some form of tailored support to help them make successful transitions into adulthood and independence.

Graph 9: Support needs of young people accessing homelessness services in August 2017



Not in education, employment or training

Reflecting findings from previous years' *Young and Homeless* reports, the most commonly identified support need among young people accessing homelessness services, related to them not being involved in education, employment or training (44% of the respondents). Some of the young people that were interviewed lived in a geographically isolated area with high unemployment and largely seasonal work. They explained how the lack of employment opportunities contributed to their homelessness and hindered them in moving on from services.

Young people mentioned that a lack of skills, confidence and experience and, in some cases, simply not knowing what they wanted to do, posed further barriers in accessing employment. As explored in Chapter 3, homelessness services play a key role in improving the future employment prospects of young people, for example, through training and skills programmes.

Homelessness providers reported that a total of 4,981 young people accessing their services were in employment, education or training. Of this total, 21% were in school or full-time college, 12% were in paid employment and 8% were in training (e.g. apprenticeship or government training scheme).

Independent living skills

A lack of independent living skills was the second most commonly reported support need (41%). Many young people may have no prior experience of managing a tenancy, liaising with landlords, or paying bills. As such, homelessness accommodation and support services have a key role to play in helping develop skills to access and sustain future accommodation:

We have always worked with young people with a number of needs, many of whom have difficulties with relationships and who lack the skills to live independently, either because they have come directly from care or because they have been brought up in an environment where those skills were not taught (Homelessness service provider survey respondent)

Some young people especially emphasised the need for help in developing budgeting skills, and highlighted the financial difficulties and material hardship of those who cannot rely on familial support:

*If I'd just moved out straight away, probably I'd be ****ed, basically ... I'd got myself into loads of debt and everything, because I'd never had my own money before, so I think I just went happy go Larry with the spending, didn't pay my bills (Young person)*

It's [Jobseeker's Allowance] very hard to live on. People are like 'go live with your parents'. You just can't do that. You have to be independent, and yes, but it is not enough. Myself, I pay £6 electric a month and £20 water and you've got a phone bill, if you have a phone, yes ... you can't afford to buy good food, isn't it? (Focus group)

Mental health

Homelessness service providers reported that 35% of the young people accessing their services experienced mental health problems. Mental illness can be a causal or a preceding factor for a young person becoming homeless, or can be exacerbated because of homelessness.⁴⁵

Providers were asked if the needs profile of the young people supported by their services had changed over the past year, and several stated that mental health needs in particular had increased. A range of explanations were given for this change, with responses suggesting that a lack of support may be playing a particularly significant role (see below).

Substance misuse

Homelessness service providers reported that 28% of young people had needs relating to substance misuse. Research demonstrates that, compared to the substance misuse issues experienced by adults seeking treatment, young people are more likely to seek help for cannabis use.⁴⁶ Some of the young people stated in the interviews that they would use cannabis to self-medicate for mental health problems and earlier experiences of trauma.

'It wasn't an addiction for me cannabis, it was more for pain relief, just to take the edge off me feeling angry. It was more calming ... I'd get sick, because I'd get to the point where I couldn't talk to anyone. It was full-on aggression, full-on anger, to the point where I couldn't remember what I'd done. I was that angry, I'd black out. It was hard, because I went to the doctor, and they were, like, "Oh, it's anxiety and depression," but personally, I thought I was going insane. Like, I've never been so messed up and confused. It was awful (Young person).

⁴⁵ Mental Health Foundation (2006) Making the link between mental health and youth homelessness. A pan London study Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/making-link-between-mental-health-and-youth-homelessness>

⁴⁶ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

Isolation and loneliness

Some young people highlighted experiences of isolation and loneliness as key issues. Earlier research has shown that people accessing homelessness services experience extremely high levels of isolation and loneliness, which may then negatively affect their moving on.⁴⁷ In our interviews, young people reported feeling lonely within different stages of the pathway, such as before accessing services, while staying at the accommodation services, and once they moved into independent tenancies.

'Respondent: It's a lot better living here. It's definitely different, because it's, kind of, lonely when you've lived with a family ... That's the sort of thing I find. I think one thing that happens with a lot of people, as young people, especially if they're not in college, if they drop out of college, they'll find that they get lonely. Once you get lonely, you mentally get worse (Young person)

Feedback from young people suggests that services can play a key role in mitigating feelings of isolation and loneliness; particularly by means of regular group activities and facilitating interactions with other young people supported by the service.

And then they do baking on a Monday, so it's the same thing but we do cakes and stuff like that. And then sometimes we have movie nights, basically just to keep us together so then we're not always on our own, sort of thing (Young person).

This scheme does bring a bit of heart out of you. It does pull you together a bit. It makes you think, 'Right, there are quite a few young people here. I'm not alone. I don't know. It's just the atmosphere, just the experience ... It's being with young people or being on your own, because you're all going up. You're going through similar stuff, so it doesn't make you feel as alone ... do you know what I mean? I go around yours. We cook chicken. Play Monopoly. At least I'm not sat on my own, do you know what I mean? (Focus group).

Other support needs

Homelessness service providers highlighted a lack of relationship skills (20%), a lack of numeracy skills (16%), and offending histories (15%) as further key support needs of the young people accessing their services. A theme in the interviews was the wide range of needs displayed. This in turn highlights the need for services to take account of and respond to the unique circumstances of each young person, recognising that these may vary greatly along the lines of gender, age, experience of childhood trauma, past experiences, family structure, sexual orientation and individual skills and abilities.⁴⁸

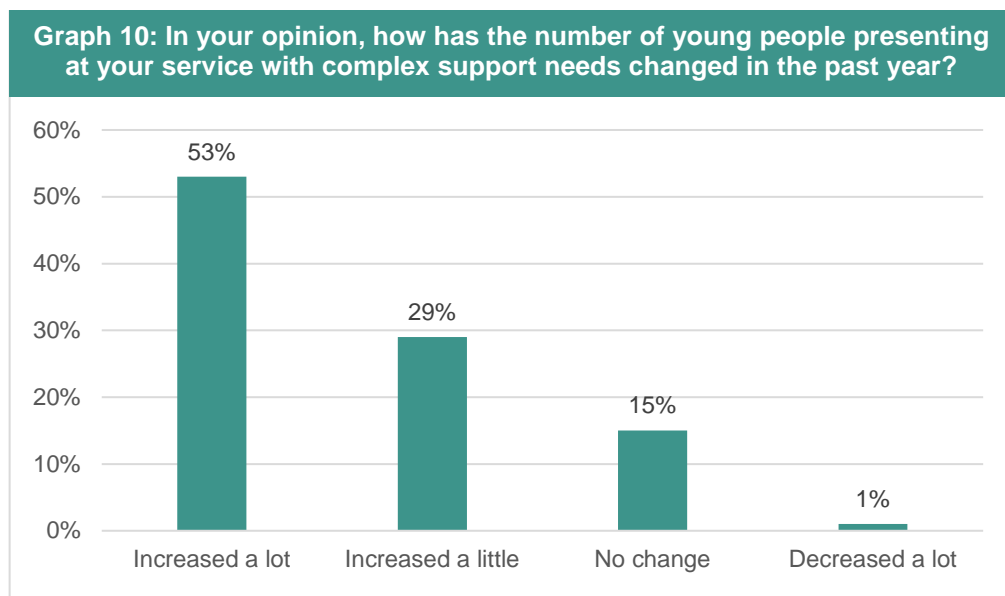
Then at the same time, everybody's different. There are people at different levels. Some people need help with ringing up the Job Centre, washing up. Some people, as myself, I don't need any of that. Obviously, I was living a pretty good life before coming on to the scheme. The only support I feel like I've had from these guys is somewhere to stay, really, and yes, that's it (Focus group).

⁴⁷ Sanders, B. and Brown, B. (2015) 'I was all on my own': experiences of loneliness and isolation amongst homeless people, Available at: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20504/crisis_i_was_all_on_my_own_2016.pdf

⁴⁸ Gaetz, S. (2014) A safe and decent place to live. Towards a housing first framework for youth, Available at: http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HFFWYouth-FullReport_0.pdf

Increased occurrence of complex needs

Most responding homelessness service providers (82%) reported that the number of young people presenting at their services with complex and multiple needs has increased in the past year (Graph 10). Within this study, complex needs are defined as experiencing more than two of the following problems: homelessness, substance misuse, contact with the criminal justice system, and mental health issues. A wider body of research has indicated that young people accessing homelessness services now present with a greater diversity of needs and/or increased severity of needs.⁴⁹



As explored below, providers offered a range of explanations for this trend, including constrained capacity and resources within the homelessness sector, the lack of specialist mental health services, and the need for more early intervention and prevention initiatives.

Capacity and resources in homelessness services

Several respondents attributed increased complex needs to reductions in funding and capacity within the homelessness sector. Recent analysis of the Homeless England database (a live online database containing information of over 1,100 services), indicates an ongoing decrease in the support available to single homeless people.⁵⁰ Survey respondents said that the reduced capacity and/or closure of certain services, has resulted in concentrations of individuals with multiple and complex needs in certain services, as well as reduced provision for people with lower needs.

This is due to reduced number of providers for the age group in the city, so we now receive higher needs customer (Homelessness provider respondent).

Local authority not given resources to fund supported accommodation for those with lower level emotional health issues, they are forced to wait until more serious symptoms arise.

⁴⁹ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

⁵⁰ In terms of a reduction in the number of accommodation projects and bed spaces, as highlighted in our Annual Review reports <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/annual-review-of-single-homelessness-support-in-england>

There have been serious cutbacks in specialist provision which in the past has catered for complex needs (Homelessness provider respondent).

Some services also reported the introduction of stricter access criteria, whilst others said that services were increasingly focusing on young people with more complex needs.

I believe that these are the only young people now who fit eligibility for the service. Previously we would have a wide spread of support needs but now everybody has to have high/complex needs in order to access our supported housing (Homelessness provider respondent).

Availability of specialist mental health services

A limited availability of specialist mental health services was also seen as contributing to the increase in complex needs. Respondents highlighted the significant difficulties young people face in accessing mental health services, as manifested in long waiting lists and/or slow referral processes, and a scarcity of specialised services in certain areas. As a result, young people's problems were reported to worsen or intensify over time.

I think it is increasingly difficult for young people who do not have an advocate (and even those who do) to access the services that they need, especially mental health services. The young people fall through the cracks, their needs are not responded to, and the situation becomes increasingly complex as they look for other ways to deal with the situation (Homelessness provider respondent).

Lack of early intervention and prevention

Homelessness service providers also reported that a lack of early intervention or prevention during childhood or adolescence, contributed to an increase in complex needs for both the young people and their families. Problems remain unaddressed at an early stage and become more complex by the time young people present at homelessness services.

This appears to be due to Supporting People services being cut that would previously support parents, resulting in crisis happening more frequently whereas the previous support services would act as a prevention barrier. With no such barrier, crisis in families is now more prevalent (Local authority respondent).

Lack of support for young people in earlier adolescence means that by the time they are reaching our age range of 16-21, they are already experiencing complex issues such as substance misuse and family breakdown and mental health issues. Services, for example youth and children services would have previously picked these young people up in early adolescence (13-16) and worked directly with them, but those services are no longer there or so severely cut that workers have to focus on crisis rather than prevention (Local authority respondent).

Chapter 3. Causes of youth homelessness

Explanations of the causes of homelessness tend to focus on either structural or personal factors. Structural factors include social and economic issues such as poverty, the welfare safety net, unemployment, housing supply and housing cost issues. Personal factors cover issues such as mental health, substance dependency, lack of social support, or family breakdown.

Recent discussions emphasise the interrelated and complex nature of these causes and that - to varying degrees in varying circumstances - interpersonal, economic, individual, and housing factors all play a role.⁵¹ This chapter looks at the causes of youth homelessness, and focuses specifically on factors that contribute to family relationship breakdown. The second part of the chapter looks at the impact of welfare policy developments on young people's housing options.

Key Findings

- Family relationship breakdown continues to be leading cause of youth homelessness. 49% of young people accessing services became homeless for this reason.
- Structural factors including overcrowding, financial hardship and welfare benefit restrictions played a role in contributing to family tension and breakdown.
- Personal and relational factors such as mental or physical ill health also played a role. These were often experienced by a family member rather than the young person.
- 92% of respondents said delayed payments under Universal Credit were having an impact on young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation.
- 90% said benefit sanctions were having an impact.

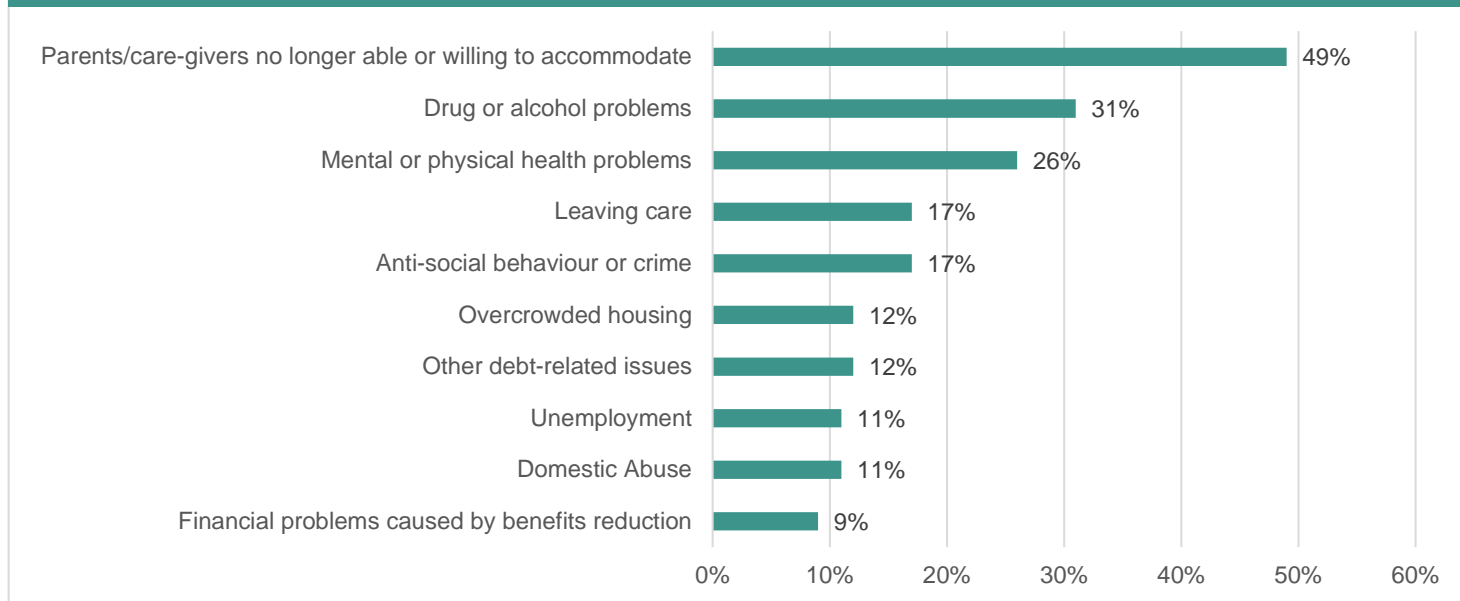
Family relationship breakdown

Research has repeatedly demonstrated that relationship breakdown between young people and their family or primary caregivers is the leading cause of youth homelessness.⁵² In this year's survey, 49% of the young people accessing homelessness accommodation services became homeless when their parents/caregivers were no longer able or willing to house them (Graph 11). This finding challenges the assumption that young people are necessarily able to rely on familial support.

⁵¹ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

⁵² Homeless Link (2015) Young and Homeless 2015, Available at: <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research>

Graph 11: How many of the young people accessing your service in August 2017 needed accommodation for the following reasons? (top 10 reasons)



Reflecting on both their own personal experiences and those of their fellow residents and peers, most of the young people taking part in the interviews saw relationship breakdown as the main reason for becoming homeless. Mirroring research by the charity Depaul, young people’s pathways into services were neither uniform nor linear, with many respondents reporting that they stayed in a number of temporary living arrangements before accessing support.⁵³

In the consultations informing this study, Youth Voice advisors highlighted that current statistics fail to incorporate many of the complex reasons why young people leave home. The discussion below draws on findings of the qualitative interviews to explore the key factors that underscore family relationship breakdown.

Structural factors

Participants were asked to reflect on reasons why a young person would no longer be able to stay in the family home. The responses showed that structural factors relating to financial hardship, housing, and labour market pressures greatly contribute to family tensions and conflict (see Introduction). Three young people were asked by their parents or caregivers to leave because of overcrowding.⁵⁴ Several who were living in a geographically isolated area with few employment opportunities were asked to leave because they were unable to find work, thereby demonstrating the effect of labour market factors on youth homelessness. Welfare benefit rules and restrictions also played a role.

⁵³ McCoy, S. and Hug, B. (2016) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones. Young people’s experiences of hidden homelessness, Available at: http://cdn.basw.co.uk/upload/basw_65602-5.pdf

⁵⁴ Research has showed that in England, home overcrowding has remained at a high level since 2009 and is clearly linked to the shortfall in available affordable housing. See Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H., Bramley, G., Wilcox, S., and Watts, B. (2017) The homelessness monitor: England 2017. Available at: https://crisis.org.uk/media/236823/homelessness_monitor_england_2017.pdf

He was having money difficulties. The thing is, if I was, I was going to finish education, he'd stop getting money for me and then I'd have to contribute to the council tax, which, just say I was on job seeker's allowance, if I gave him all of my money to pay for all the food, the electric, the gas, and then he'd have to pay more council tax than he would before ... It just wouldn't work. We just couldn't afford to live there, sort of thing (Young person).

'F: Yes, like if you are living there, if your parents are claiming benefits it means you can't, or vice versa, so some parents will kick their kid out because then they can't claim all their benefits. F: I've got a friend, whose mum kicked her out because she didn't want to stay in college because of health reasons, physical health reasons, and her mum said that she couldn't afford to keep her there because she wouldn't get Child Benefit for her if she wasn't in education (Focus Group).

Several young people made reference to the financial difficulties experienced by their families, which were exacerbated once families stopped receiving Child Benefit (usually when a child turns 16 if they are not in full-time education or training). Findings from a recent review of youth homelessness has suggested that financial difficulties may be playing a more significant role within family relationship breakdown and youth homelessness.⁵⁵ The above observations are particularly important when considering other research, which suggests that childhood poverty is a key predictor of homelessness in later life.⁵⁶

Personal and relational factors underpinning family relationship breakdowns

For some young people, individual circumstances and relational factors, such as mental and physical ill health or substance misuse, played a key role in them either choosing or being asked to leave home. These difficulties were frequently experienced by a family member or caregiver rather than the young person themselves, and in some cases were happening alongside the young person's own problems.

Young people often told us that early support (for instance in the form of mediation) had not been provided, and services only intervened at a much later stage when the relationship had already broken down. Some young people highlighted the failure of statutory services to provide adequate support.

YP: I became a second parent and it was too much stress for me. Mum was a single mum and she has possible bipolar, it's getting investigated, and she also has a couple of physical problems ... It got very weighty eventually, and it ended up - me and my mum would get into arguments about finances. It's not something a 16-year-old should be doing and arguing about finances with your mum.

Int: Can I ask if there was any support available or being received by your mum?

YP: No. Basically, the doctors were just, "Here's some antidepressants. Go on then." The doctor we had, he was very nasty. He thought we were all hypochondriacs and never believed anything (Young person interview).

Some young people also reported that experiences of domestic violence and childhood abuse or neglect contributed to leaving home. Experiences of violence featured much more heavily in the young women's

⁵⁵ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

⁵⁶ Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S. (2017) Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?, *Housing Studies*, Available at: <http://housingfirsteurope.eu/assets/files/2017/07/Homelessness-in-the-UK-who-is-most-at-risk.pdf>

narratives than in those of the young men; both in their own personal relationships and in the relationships they witnessed growing up.

Leaving care

Although the survey findings show that a wide range of factors contribute to youth homelessness (Graph 11), the experiences of care figured prominently within some of the interviews. A wide body of research has shown that young people who have been in care face a disproportionate risk of homelessness.⁵⁷

The young people taking part in this study often felt that they had been insufficiently prepared for independent living during their time in care, and inadequately supported by social services when relationships with their caregivers broke down. Many reported lacking the resources needed to make successful transitions when exiting the system, such as obtaining food and clothing, education and work experience, as well as information and advice on their housing options.

Despite recognition of the importance of effectively preparing care leavers for independent living, practices can vary significantly between local authorities. Several young people in this study described a 'cliff edge' move out of care, and felt that they lacked the support of a trusted adult during this transitional phase:

'It's like when turned 18, social sent me a letter saying, "You're no longer on our case, bye," basically ... Social, literally they just dropped me for a letter ... It's, I don't know, it just makes you feel unwanted really, especially, with the social thing made me felt unwanted. It's like all my life when I've had them involved with me I wanted to get rid of them. The moment I need you to stay, they just disappeared and went and literally left with no one (Young person)

Case study 2 provides an example of effective local partnerships between local authority children's services, housing departments, and local homelessness service providers. Where adequate accommodation and support exists, young people can be linked with suitable options within the pathway, which can provide support until they are able to manage their own tenancy. Two young interviewees said that they never considered themselves to be homeless, as their support workers had arranged appropriate accommodation placements, while providing support to assist the transition from leaving care.

⁵⁷ Centrepoin (2017) From care to where? Care leavers' access to accommodation, Available at: <https://centrepoin.org.uk/media/2035/from-care-to-where-centrepoin-report.pdf>

Northamptonshire: preventing homelessness among young people and care leavers

The number of young people becoming homeless in Northamptonshire has decreased after the introduction of strategies aiming to improve the response to youth homelessness, which included a highly effective housing protocol for care leavers.

In 2016, led by Northampton Borough Council, Northamptonshire's seven local housing authorities and Children's Services developed and agreed on a new housing protocol for care leavers with housing and tenancy-related support needs. The protocol has been the catalyst for a more consistent and coordinated approach between the local housing authorities and children's social care departments. The protocol provides clear and consistent procedures and improved referral processes and interventions, and emphasises effective multi-agency working. As a result, relationships between local statutory and voluntary organisations have improved, and young care leavers receive the support necessary to avoid homelessness and have an optimum start in life.

The success of the protocol relies on the following key factors:

- **Effective information sharing** between local housing authorities, children's services, and support providers. With the young person's written permission, relevant information is shared at the earliest opportunity. This sharing of information aids referrals and the joint assessment of the young people's needs.
- **An individual pathway plan** is developed for each young person, featuring a detailed assessment of their needs and a coherent strategy of how these will be met. This plan is developed and carried out in collaboration with all relevant agencies.
- **Social workers and personal advisors prepare care leavers for independent living** on an emotional as well as a practical level, with the Leaving Care Team particularly focusing on helping young people develop independent living skills.
- **The availability of various housing options for care leavers**, such as moving into supported housing, moving to social rented housing, or remaining with former foster carers. Young people are encouraged to move into independent accommodation at a time appropriate for them and *not* necessarily when they reach 18.
- **Assistance in accessing social rental housing** is available for all care leavers, covering advice and support in accessing, managing and sustaining their tenancies. For example, Personal Advisers will complete a Housing Referral Form, accompany the young person to their Housing Options interview, and liaise with social landlords as the young person progresses on to bidding, and securing accommodation

Communication, joint working, and problem-solving have been at the core of the protocol's success. By promoting greater consistency within the young people's support plans and access to services, the protocol avoids a "cliff edge" move out of care and prevents homelessness among young people.

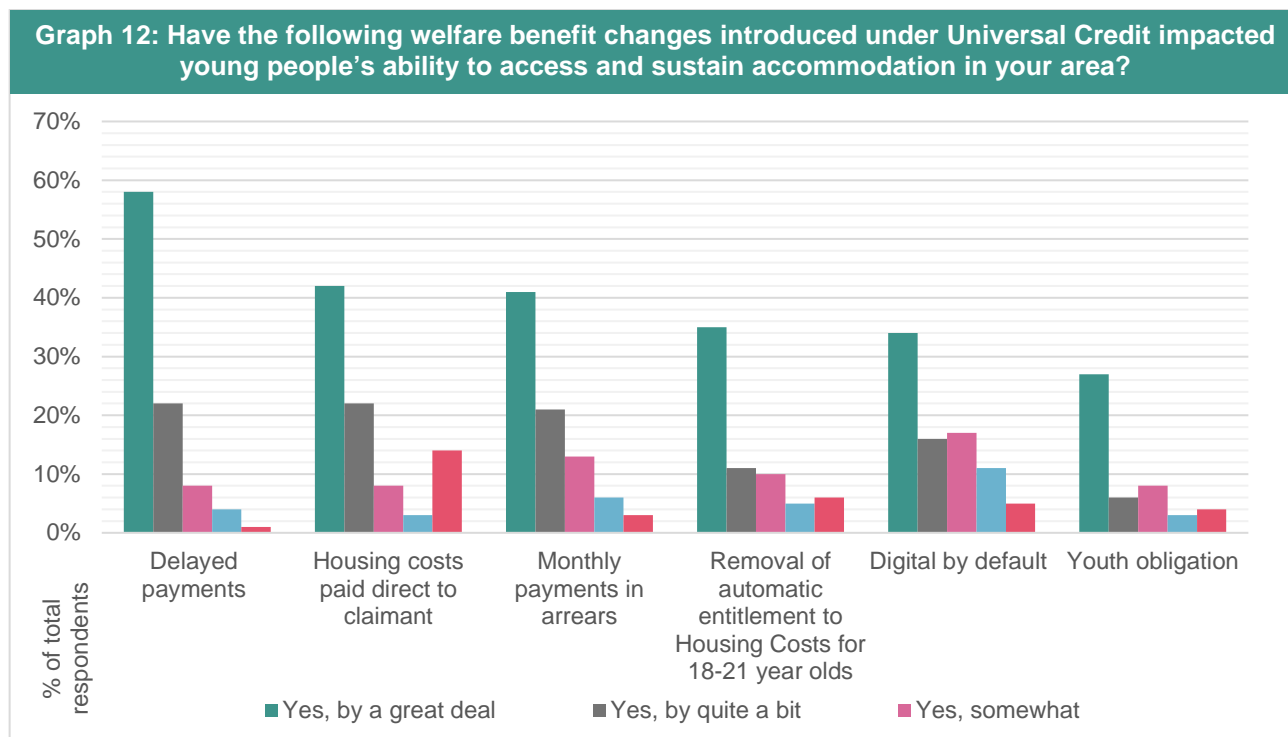
Welfare policy developments

Welfare policy developments that involve changes in administrative arrangements as well as reductions in entitlements – can significantly impact homelessness. Changes to the welfare safety net can affect the preventative agenda and drivers of homelessness and help or hinder people’s ability to move out of homelessness. Our survey explored homelessness provider and local authority views on the impact of welfare benefit changes as introduced within Universal Credit, and wider welfare reforms over the past year.

Universal Credit

Introduced in April 2013 and followed by a national and ongoing gradual roll-out, Universal Credit is the biggest shake-up in the benefit system of the past 60 years. Universal Credit aims to simplify the benefit system by combining certain working age welfare benefits into one single payment.⁵⁸

97 responding local authorities and homelessness service providers confirmed that young people supported by their services were receiving Universal Credit. The findings indicate that all reforms within Universal Credit are impacting young people’s ability to access and sustain accommodation (Graph 12).



N: 95

The findings strongly suggest that the administrative changes and delays under Universal Credit are negatively impacting young people’s access to housing, and therefore potentially exacerbating the homelessness trends discussed in Chapter 1.

⁵⁸ This includes Jobseeker’s Allowance; Housing Benefit; Working Tax Credit; Child Tax Credit; Employment and Support Allowance; and Income Support

Delayed payments are one area of particular concern, with 92% of the local authorities and homelessness providers stating they were impacting on young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation in their area (58% said it was having an impact 'by a great deal' and 22% said 'by quite a bit').

As discussed in Chapter 2, many young people have limited budgeting skills and lack experience in managing a tenancy. These factors in turn raise concerns about the changes under Universal Credit where the default position is that housing costs are paid directly to claimants, which 72% of the respondents reported to impact young people's access to housing. 75% also highlighted the impact of arrears in monthly payments.

The Youth Obligation was introduced for unemployed young people aged 18-21 in April 2017, introducing increased work and training-related conditionality. 33% of survey respondents reported that this reform affects young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation by 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit,' and 43% reported that it affected them 'to some degree.'

Removal of housing costs for 18-21 year olds

Regulations introduced from 1 April 2017 removed the automatic entitlement to the housing cost element of Universal Credit for unemployed 18-21 year olds, unless they could show that they met an exemption. This policy was in effect while our research was being conducted, and the survey explored local authority and service provider views on the impact of this change on young people in their local area (discussed below). The survey respondents overwhelmingly highlighted the negative impact of removing the automatic right to housing costs, and their concerns highlight the importance of ensuring a safety net is available to vulnerable young people.

On Thursday 29th March 2018, the Government announced that these regulations would be amended, so that all 18-21 years would be entitled to housing costs within Universal Credit.

Barriers to accessing housing

Most homelessness providers and local authorities predicted that removing the automatic entitlement would exacerbate the difficulties young people face in accessing accommodation; this particularly in light of the existing shortfall between welfare benefits entitlements and rent levels:

Huge impact, as this age group are not landlords' preferred choice of tenant group as it is due to the shared room rate falling below the weekly rent charged and the lack that they are unable to guarantee benefit paid directly to themselves, they simply will not be able to find accommodation as it won't be affordable and given we have little success in enabling young people to return home, this will leave them sofa surfing and increase this problem inevitably leading to increased rough sleeping.' (Local authority respondent)

Several respondents highlighted the reluctance of social and private sector landlords to rent to young people, and expressed concern that this would intensify following removing the entitlement:

Our local private landlords are already worried about the impact of Universal Credit and with this removal of automatic entitlement for young people this will have a huge impact on them being considered for accommodation (Local authority respondent)

'It will have a big effect on young people who are already marginalised by Social Landlords who are already risk averse and being selective on those they select for tenancy.' (Local authority respondent)

Reduced accessibility to benefits

The findings suggest that the removal of housing costs would pose further barriers for young people in accessing benefit entitlements and subsequently housing and add to an already complex process. Not all young people would have the knowledge, skills and support to adapt to the new rules, and respondents expressed concern that some young people would therefore disengage and choose not to claim entitlements. The findings also suggest that this change would place increased pressure on already stretched organisations in helping young people navigate the changes.

It will prevent young people from accessing housing and due to lack of support and advice available they will not know how to prove the exception which could well be applicable (Homelessness provider respondent).

Young people do not understand the concept so a drain on staff time having to challenge decisions hence homelessness increases as young people get frustrated and walk away (Homelessness provider respondent).

Increased youth homelessness

Concerns were expressed that the removal of housing costs would put more young people at risk of homelessness. Several respondents predicted an increase in rent arrears and consequently an increase in evictions, while others expressed concern about the impact of delays when processing claims.

At the moment we have had few Universal Credit claimants to see the true impact on our services. The full roll out has yet to happen. At the point of this coming into effect we are expecting an increase in young people who will be coming to the service through failed tenancies (Homelessness provider respondent)

Increased risk of homelessness and crime due to poverty from waiting for claims to commence (Homelessness provider respondent)

The above factors could also result in young people remaining in unsafe temporary living arrangements.

'Some young people living in inadequate or risky situations with family members may feel that they have to remain due to not being eligible for housing costs (Homelessness provider respondent).

Young people will be forced to remain in unsuitable accommodation with friends or family, increasing sofa surfing and potentially increasing rough sleeping (Homelessness provider respondent).

Preparing for the changes

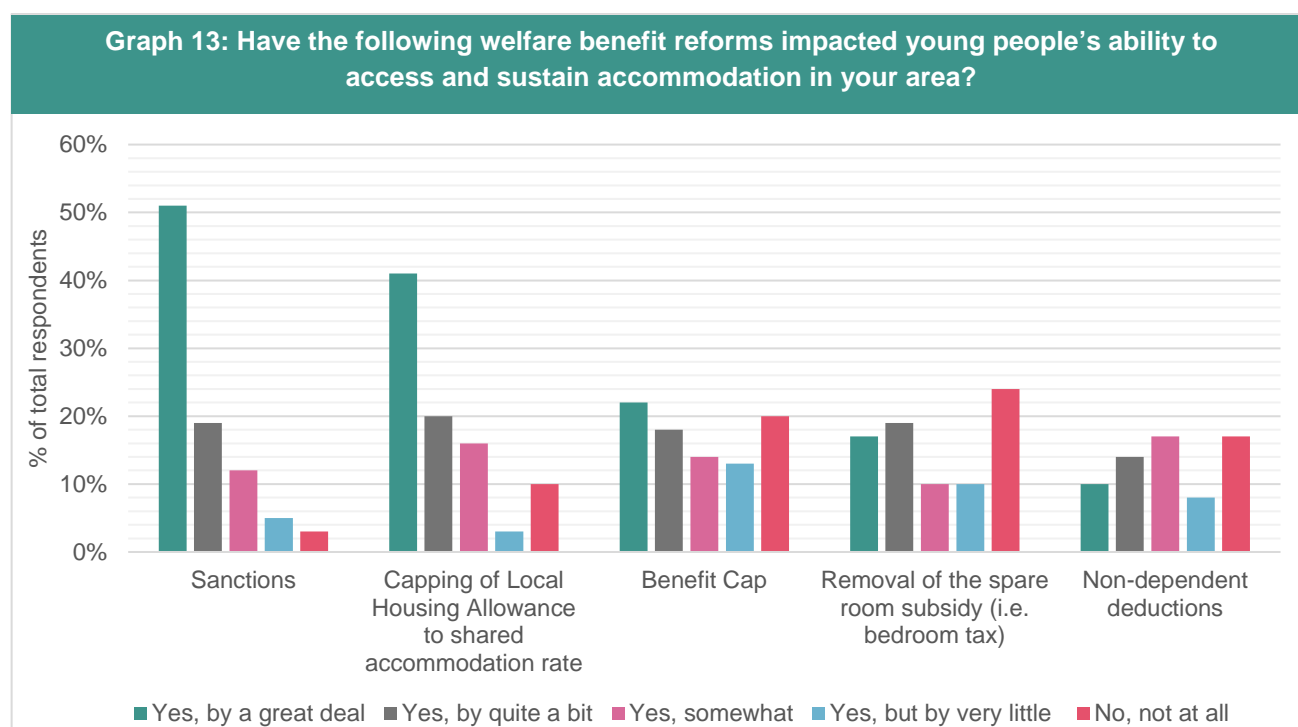
The findings suggest that statutory and voluntary services could have played a key role in mitigating possible negative impacts on young people. 85% of respondents stated that measures were being taken to prepare for these changes. These organisations mainly reported conducting staff training on the new policies and regulations, and on supporting young people in managing their debts and finances. Some services also reported meeting with Jobcentre Plus staff to explain the impact of the changes on people using their services, while others worked collaboratively with partner agencies to 'understand the roll-out process and timetable [as well as] sharing good practice with partners' (Homelessness provider survey respondent).

We are liaising with external agencies and our internal housing benefit team to try and gauge the 'number' of those 18-21 year olds that will be affected and what can be done about that (Homelessness provider respondent)

Partnership working with DWP and local authority to ensure that staff and young people are equipped with knowledge to deal with this. Also, partnership working with food banks to try and alleviate some issues that will arise (Homelessness provider respondent)

Wider welfare benefit reforms

Further welfare benefit changes have caused concern among the homelessness sector, such as increased conditionality, and a tougher benefits sanctions regime. The surveys explored provider and local authority views on the impact of key reforms on people's ability to access and sustain accommodation (Graph 13).



N: 147

The findings indicate that both benefit sanctions and the capping of the Local Housing Allowance to the shared accommodation rate are particularly impacting young people's housing options.

Since the introduction of the Welfare Reform Act 2012, the rates and severity of benefit sanctions have significantly increased. Earlier research by Homeless Link found that homeless people are disproportionately affected by benefit sanctions, with nearly a third of homeless JSA claimants being sanctioned, compared to an average of 3% of regular JSA claimants.⁵⁹ The findings of this study provide further evidence of their detrimental impact on young people's housing options, with 90% of the respondents reporting an impact, and 80% stating that the impact was 'by a great deal' or 'quite a bit.'

⁵⁹ Homeless Link (2013) *A high cost to pay: The impact of benefit sanctions on homeless people*, Available at: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/A%20High%20Cost%20to%20Pay%20Sept%2013.pdf>

The eligible rent for those aged below 35 has been capped to the shared accommodation rate (SAR) even when not sharing a house, with people being required to cover any shortfall in rent themselves. Several commentators have highlighted the very limited availability of accommodation below the SAR rate.⁶⁰ 80% of the respondents felt that the cap impacted young people's ability to access and sustain accommodation in their area, with 61% reporting that the impact is 'by a great deal' or 'quite a bit.'

The bedroom tax was reported as most likely to not have an impact (24%). However, a total of 56% of the responders stated it to have some form of impact.

⁶⁰ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

Chapter 4. Preventing youth homelessness

Prevention initiatives are vital in stopping young people from becoming homeless in the first place, and in helping them to avoid further problems or harm. Since the Homelessness Act 2002 and the widespread adoption of Housing Option approaches across England, the prevention of youth homelessness in England has received greater emphasis.⁶¹ In addition, the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, places new legal duties on local authorities to prevent and relieve homelessness for those who are eligible, irrespective of priority need. This chapter explores the initiatives that are currently available to prevent youth homelessness, and highlights key gaps in existing provision.

Key Findings

- 37% of responding providers and local authorities said there was an inadequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness.
- Sign-posting to other services (96%) and advice services (88%) are the most widely available prevention initiatives.
- Only 47% of survey respondents said education in schools was available in their area.
- 66% of respondents said mediation services were available. The interviews point towards significant variation in the quality and availability of these services.
- Early intervention services targeting young people at risk of homelessness are less widely available than other prevention initiatives.

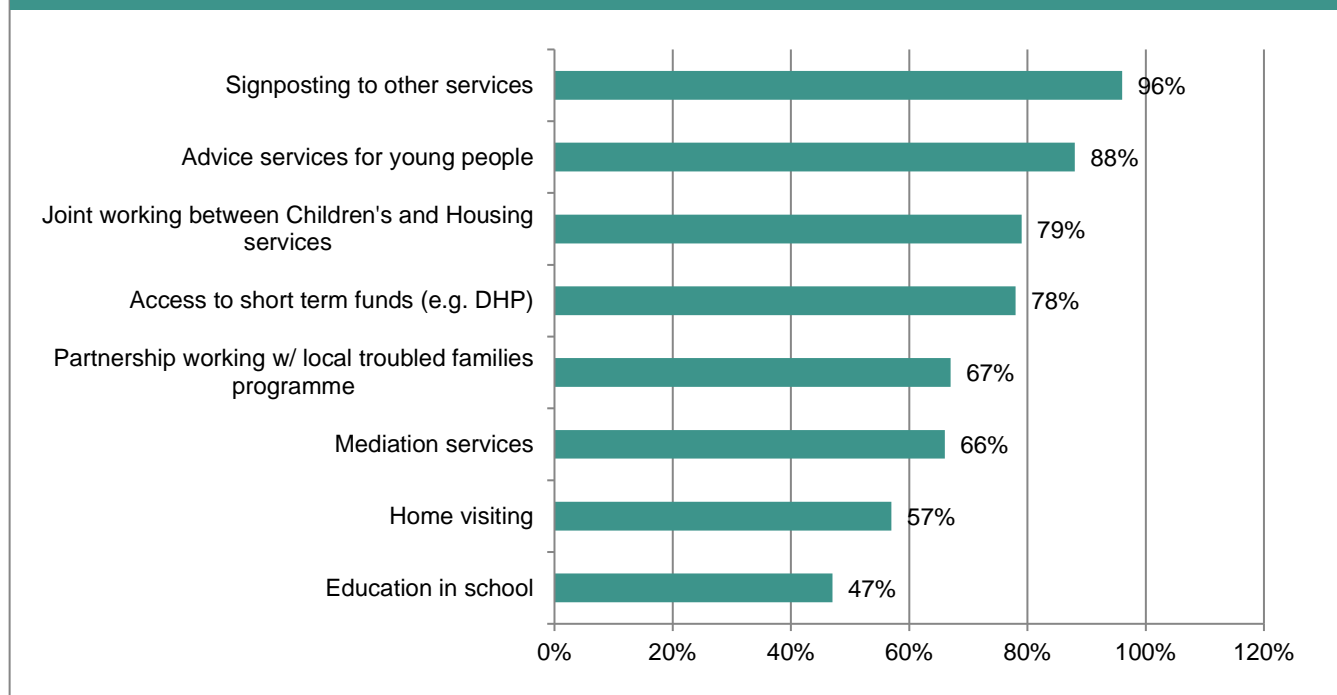
Availability of prevention initiatives

The survey findings indicate that a range of prevention initiatives are offered by local authorities and homelessness providers in England, although their availability does vary according to specific service offered (Graph 14). In addition, 37% of respondents said that they lacked a range of prevention tools to meet the needs of young people at risk of homelessness (while 37% said that existing provision was adequate).

- 66% of local authorities reported that the Positive Pathway Model is being used or developed in their area.

⁶¹ Dobie, S., Sanders, B. and Leixeira, L. (2014) *Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England*, [Online] Available at:
http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/MysteryShopping_Report_FINAL_web.pdf

Graph 14: Prevention initiatives offered by local authorities and providers



N: 149

Advice and signposting

The findings suggest that the most widely available prevention initiatives are signposting to other services (96%), and advice services for young people (88%). Advice plays a key role in helping people learn about and access their rights and entitlements, and is provided by both local authorities and a wide array of voluntary organisations, including local and national homelessness services.

Knowledge of where and how to find available support, is a crucial factor in determining how quickly and easily housing problems can be addressed. The findings do, however, suggest that young people's knowledge and ability to access advice and appropriate support may vary considerably.

The large majority of young people taking part in the interviews said they had limited knowledge, awareness or ability to access support when first leaving stable accommodation. This contrasted with the experiences of those who had pre-existing affiliations with social services or other support organisations, who were often signposted to accommodation services:

I don't always think there's probably enough support for them. And I don't know, I think they just get a bit lost. So if you weren't known to any sort of service or anything like that, and say you were living with your boyfriend or you'd fell out with your mam and you lived with your boyfriend, and that broke down. It's so easy for them just to get sort of like lost, and end up sofa surfing, then it is to try and get something. But I think I was quite lucky in a way because I was already under social services. So because I was already under social services, there was someone there that I could go to and be like, "You need to sort it," and then they would be able to help me move along. But I know a lot of other people haven't had that involvement to help put them towards it (Young person).

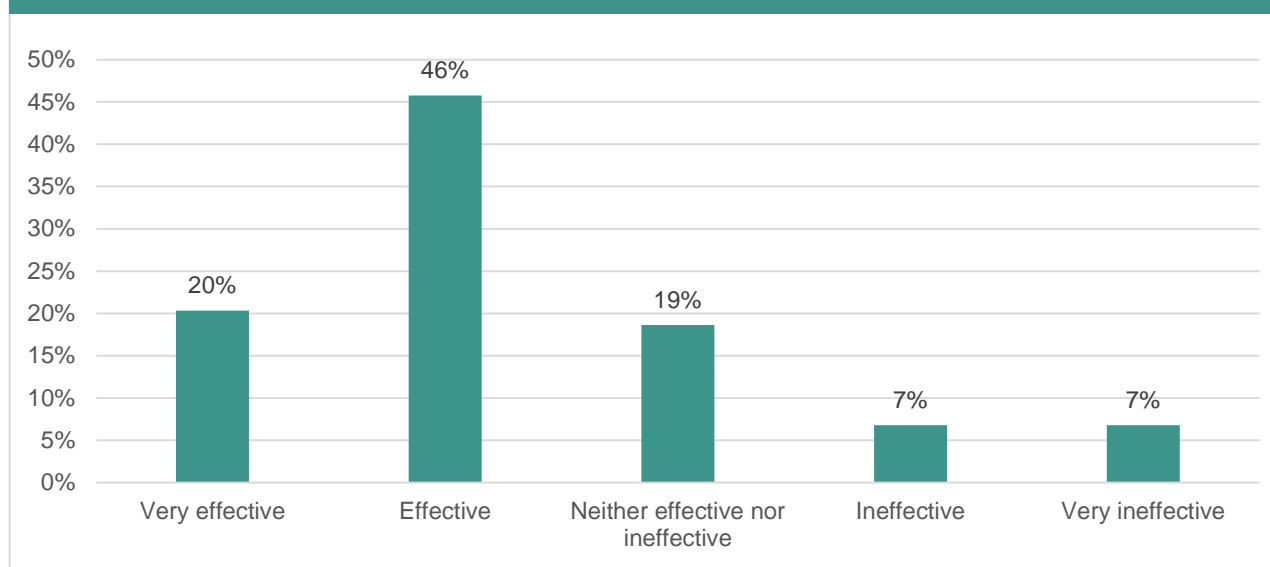
A recent evaluation of the Positive Pathway Model reported that, despite the widespread availability of advice and information services, these services often fall short in providing adequate advice to young people and their

families.⁶² Other homelessness charities have expressed concern about the quality and adequacy of existing advice services, noting that design and delivery can vary greatly between different local authorities. It is hoped that the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 from 3rd April 2018, will result in improvements in the available advice on preventing and tackling homelessness.

Joint working between housing and children services

Improved strategic and collaborative working between housing authorities and children’s social care has been at the heart of the Positive Pathway Model, with the evaluation of the model highlighting significant improvement in this area.⁶³ In our survey, a total of 79% of providers and local authorities reported joint working between housing and child services as a prevention initiative (Graph 14). The majority of local authorities (66%) also reported effective cooperation between Housing and Children’s Social Care departments so as to meet the needs of 16 and 17-year olds (Graph 15).

Graph 15: How effective is joint working between Housing and Children's Services in meeting the requirements clarified by the G vs Southwark judgement in 2009?



The need for improved cooperation between housing and child services has been reported as a key challenge within the implementation of the Positive Pathway Model,⁶⁴ with findings from this survey suggesting that although many are seeing the benefits of the model, there may be a few local authorities that require support to develop more effective partnerships.

Early intervention

Early intervention forms a core aspect of the Positive Pathway Model. Partnerships with the local Troubled Families Programme, home visits, and education in schools, are examples of early help services that can target households where young people are at high risk of homelessness.

⁶² Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

⁶³ *ibid*

⁶⁴ *Ibid*

In the interviews, several young people reported that support only became available once their problems or issues had escalated and/or when the relationship with their parent or caregiver had altogether broken down.

I think my mom just didn't understand me whatsoever. She didn't try to help, she just kicked off at me all the time. So whereas my mom just thought I was a naughty kid and I just needed to learn to behave, but it wasn't obviously as easy as that. So I think probably they should have done some more work sooner with me, definitely, even if it was around my behaviour or something, if that was the big problem with them. I think they should have done stuff with my mom too, not just the kid all the time (Young person).

The survey findings also indicate that targeted early help initiatives are less widely available than other prevention services (such as advice and signposting, see above), and other research has highlighted the challenges local authorities face in implementing this aspect of the Positive Pathway Model.⁶⁵

Some young people also said that better intervention and/or support could have been provided in schools when it became apparent that they/their families were experiencing certain problems.

I think the school knew there was something not right, because I was already starting to go to learning support things at that point for my behaviour. So I think maybe schools could have pushed things a bit further at that point to sort of nip that in the bud (Young person).

In contrast, other people reported that effective targeted support in certain colleges helped them talk their problems through and access appropriate services.

The services I've used, I've used them through college. I went into college for some issues and with my religion and it was relatable. She would know exactly what I meant, like the support workers they were born and bred in [local area] (Young person).

Research has demonstrated that certain experiences within education are associated with a higher risk of homelessness, including learning difficulties or learning disabilities, not attending, being excluded from school, and/or no/low qualifications.⁶⁶ Having the right support available earlier could play a key role in preventing later experiences of homelessness.

Education in schools

Education in schools was the least available prevention initiative, with only 47% of the survey respondents reporting that was available in their area. Education can help improve young people's awareness of the realities of homelessness, their housing options, and available support. In other research local authorities reported that engaging with schools can be problematic because of funding issues and, in some cases, a reluctance of schools to share homelessness-related information.⁶⁷ Many of the young people highlighted the importance of school-based interventions for not only addressing housing or homelessness, but also relationships, life skills, emotional health, and anger management.

⁶⁵ Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

⁶⁶ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

⁶⁷ Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

Mediation

In our survey, 66% of the responding providers and local authorities offered mediation services. Albeit under-researched, where safe and appropriate, mediation can play a key role in preventing youth homelessness by helping people stay at their homes or make planned departures if this is no longer possible. The interviews with young people highlighted significant variability in the quality and geographical availability of mediation services. Roughly half had never heard of or been offered mediation services, and others were only offered it at a late point in time when family tensions had already reached 'breaking point'.

Yes, we did mediation, but I think, like I said, it was too late to start trying things like that. It was I was going into care, so it was like a thing where for me to go into care we had to try mediation (Young person).

Another young person said that delays could impact a willingness to engage with mediation services.

I was seeing this woman, six weeks in, she was like 'okay, well, we'll put you through for family mediation ... I'll send a letter in the post and you'll get an appointment in the next few weeks. Six months later, I got a letter through the post and I was like, 'You know what? I don't want to dig it all back up. I've just started to overcome it. Didn't want to dig it all back up (Young person).

The young people had mixed opinions about the effectiveness of mediation, with one suggesting that for some families it may not be culturally acceptable. Some young people said that their parents did not want to engage with the process, while others suggest that it was offered at the wrong time:

I don't really think that mediation with different cultures doesn't really work ... when my uncle saw the letters he thought I went and got the social people on him. He seen it different, and with my culture you can't really get police or social people or social people on your parents ... my parents see that [mediation] as disrespect, as different, so I don't know. Mediation is cool, but with different cultures not the best (Young person focus group).

My parents are quite old-fashioned, so trying to sit there with them and trying to explain what I'm going through to them it just, no, as well as them trying to explain why, what's going through their heads, it's just no. It just sprouted up more arguments than was needed (Focus group 1).

Some young people were, however, in favour of mediation and felt it could (especially before problems escalated) help improve family relationships and address conflict. They also felt that mediation sessions were more likely to be successful if separate sessions with the young person and the adult were offered, and if the mediator took the time to get to know the young person.

I've never been offered anything like that ... and it would have probably helped a lot ... I feel like to have the best possible chance of staying in your home, you need to be able to have a good relationship with your parents and make sure that you don't argue with them as often as what people do nowadays. I used to have at least two, three arguments a day with my mum (Young person).

Case study 3 provides an example of a highly effective mediation service, which offers timely interventions and uses a variety of approaches, while working with schools to ensure that the services are offered at an early point in time. As explored in the following chapter, young people who are unable to stay at home will require alternative housing options and a range of support services to help them make successful transitions.

Case study 3: Providing a highly effective early intervention mediation service

talk²sort is a Homelessness Mediation Service which supports young people and families across the county of Leicestershire and is provided by The Bridge (East Midlands). talk²sort focuses on reducing conflict, improving relationships and communication and improving mental health and emotional wellbeing. The service offered is free, impartial, non-judgemental and confidential, and only requires one person to want to engage.

The project is funded by Public Health England, Children in Need and Charnwood Borough Council (DHCLG Homelessness Prevention Fund). Public Health's funding is based on an understanding of the inter-related nature of mental health and wider social factors. Public Health recognises the importance of reducing inequalities with a desire to explore ways to address young people's mental health needs outside the clinical model. A representative reported in an interview that although initially 'a bit of a leap investing in mediation,' talk²sort has become a 'value for money service which is filling a gap,' and without the service individuals would possibly present with more complex problems at a later stage.

The project has achieved exceptional outcomes. In 2015/16, 119 young people were supported, 83% of whom remained at home, while 17% were accommodated by other relatives, 92% also reported feeling more positive, and 90% reported improved communication in the family home.

I think family mediation helps everyone get their view across and you find a lot that once the parent actually realises how their kid feels, they tend to get overwhelmed and cry, because they didn't feel their kid felt like that, because they didn't listen. Once they realise that letting them open up and letting them have their say a lot more changes. It changes better (Young Person).

The success of talk²sort is built on the following key principles:

- The service is offered before families reach a crisis point. Drop-in services are offered at schools and colleges, and the service is well advertised, with many referrals being received by word of mouth.
- One-to-one meetings are offered to young people and family members prior to joint mediation sessions.
- The service employs specialist mediators who use a range of creative and participatory approaches to help families explore their problems .
- The service adopts a flexible approach to delivery. There is no time limit on support, it is offered at flexible times (including evening appointments) and at locations where people feel safe and comfortable.
- Partnership working is at the heart of the service, based on well-established relationships with referral agencies and other services.
- The service is future focussed and supports young people and families to identify for themselves realistic and achievable ways of moving forward.
- The low-cost prevention service generates significant cost savings to other, more expensive areas of public sector expenditure, including housing, health and social care.

Chapter 5. Accommodation and support services

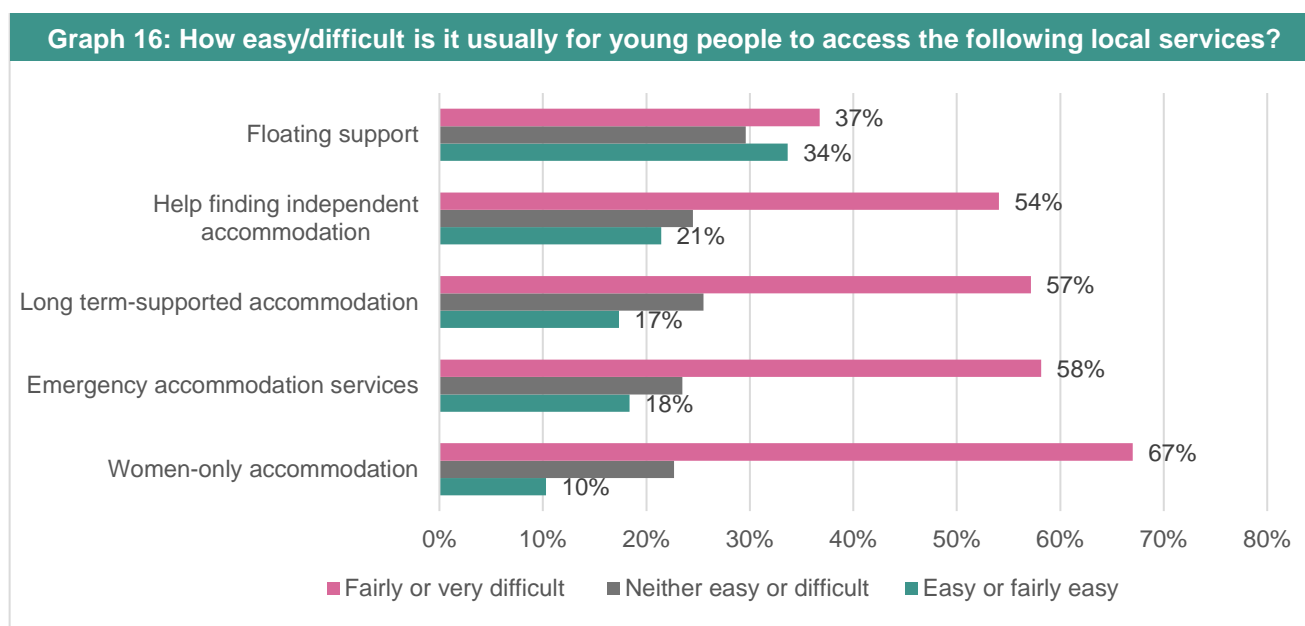
For some young people, returning to the family home is neither safe nor appropriate, which then underlines a need for alternative housing options. In the short term, these may consist of emergency supported accommodation or Nightstop⁶⁸ models. Some young people will have needs that require further support before moving on to live independently, while others may only need help in finding affordable and suitable accommodation. The diversity of young people's needs (as explored in Chapter 2), calls for a range of housing options and support services. This chapter explores accommodation models and support options which are currently available to young people who experience homelessness in England.

Key findings

- 67% of homelessness services and local authorities said that it was usually difficult for young women to access women-only accommodation.
- There is a continued shortage of emergency accommodation services for young people.
- A high number of respondents reporting difficulties in young people accessing general (59%) as well as young person specific (63%) mental health services.
- Young people that are considered too high risk to others and young people with high needs are often turned away from services.

Access to accommodation

The survey findings show that many young people in England who are homeless or at risk of homelessness experience difficulties in accessing accommodation services (Graph 16).

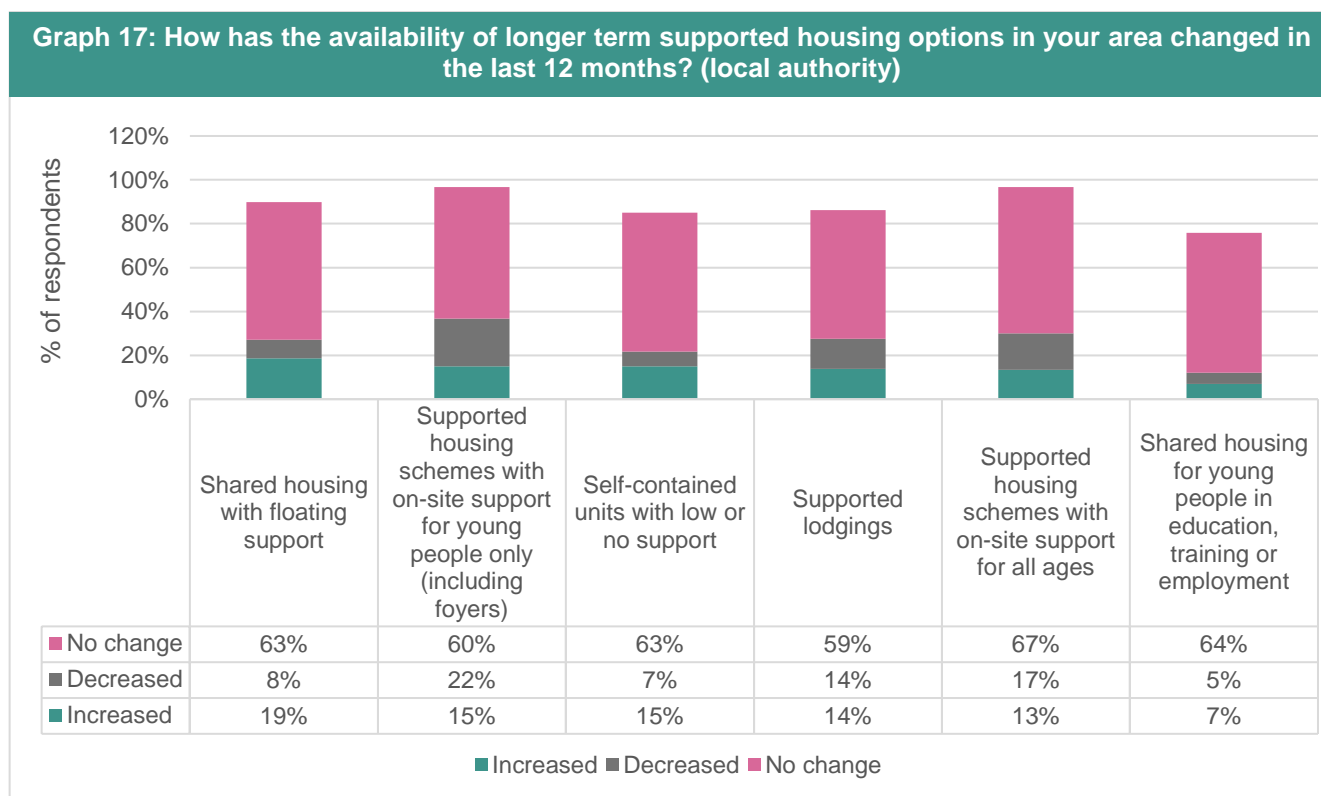


N: 98

⁶⁸ Nightstop services provides a bed for the night for young people who may be in crisis to avoid them sleeping rough or staying in unsuitable accommodation. Accommodation via Nightstop is provided by host volunteers. Depaul UK is the umbrella body for Nightstop UK - a network of 30 accredited Nightstop services throughout the UK <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/NightstopUK>

The findings highlight that women-only accommodation is the most difficult for young people to access, and over half of the homelessness providers also reported that it is fairly or very difficult for young people to access emergency accommodation, long-term accommodation, and support in finding independent accommodation.

The findings also suggest little change over the past year in the availability of longer-term supported accommodation options for young people (Graph 17).



N: 60

Most local authorities reported that there had been no change in the availability of longer-term accommodation. Those that did report changes, were more likely to experience reductions rather than increases in on-site supported housing schemes for young people (22%) and for all ages (17%). The same group were also more likely to report increases rather than decreases in shared housing with floating support (19%) and self-contained units with low level or no support (15%). This question, however, covers a relatively small sample of local authorities. Recent analysis of a live online database containing information on over 1,100 services, shows a continued reduction in the number of accommodation projects and bed spaces available for single homeless people in England.⁶⁹

A recent evaluation of the Positive Pathway Model also highlighted differences in the availability and provision of supported accommodation between local authorities.⁷⁰ Although some local authorities used the Model to

⁶⁹ Ibid Homeless Link (2017) Annual Review

⁷⁰ St Basils (2015) *Developing Positive Pathways to Adulthood*, Available at: http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf

improve coordination and response to local needs, many experienced significant difficulties in providing supported housing options, whilst some also reported reductions in the longer-term options.

Barriers to accessing services

Services usually have access criteria in place, as required by commissioners or funders or based on an assessment of support needs and risks that can be safely managed within an accommodation project. Respondents identified the three main reasons for refusing access to young people over the past year:

1. **The young person was considered high risk to others:** 73% of providers reported this as one of the top three reasons for refusing access to their services over the past year.
2. **The young person's needs were too high:** 69% reported this as one of the top three reasons for being unable to assist young people over the past year.
3. **The young person has no local connection:** 52% of respondents identified this as one of the top three reasons.

These findings indicate that young people with multiple and complex needs are most likely to have difficulty accessing the needed support.

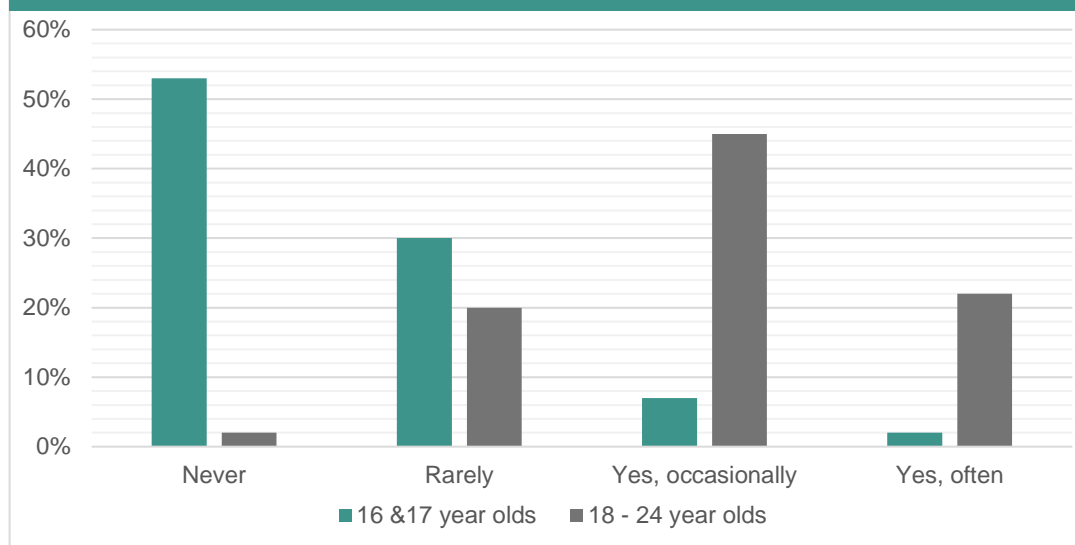
Emergency accommodation

Emergency accommodation plays a key role in preventing young people from sleeping rough or staying in unsafe temporary living arrangements where they face considerable risk of harm (e.g., sexual, mental or physical abuse, or pressure to take drugs or alcohol).⁷¹ The findings suggest a continued shortage of suitable emergency housing options for young people in many areas of England. Most of the responding providers (58%) felt it to be fairly difficult or very difficult for young people to access emergency accommodation services in their area (Graph 16).

A lack of available emergency accommodation can result in local authorities using inappropriate housing options, such as bed and breakfast accommodation (Graph 18).

⁷¹ McCoy, S. (2018) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two. A quantitative exploration of young people's experience of temporary living. Available at: <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/danger-zones-stepping-stones-phase-two>

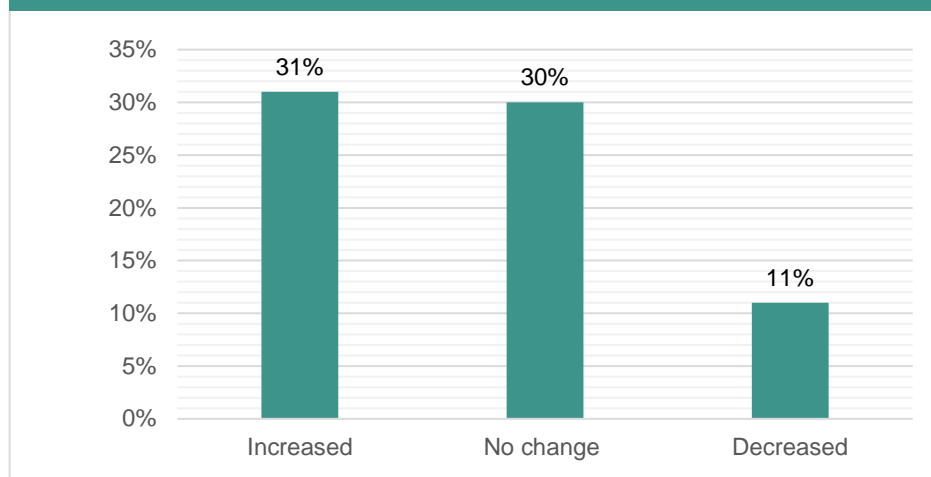
Graph 18: Do you use bed and breakfasts to accommodate the following groups of young people?



N local authority: 60

Responding local authorities reported never (53%) or rarely (30%) using bed and breakfasts to accommodate young people between the ages of 16 and 17. This type of accommodation was, however, reported as being often (22%) or occasionally (45%) used to accommodate people aged 18-24. Only one local authority stated that they never used bed and breakfast accommodation for this age cohort. It is also concerning that, although 30% reported no change in the use of this accommodation, almost the same number of local authorities reported an increase (Graph 19).

Graph 19: How has your use of bed and breakfasts to accommodate young people changed over the past 12 months?



N Local authority: 59

In the open text responses, service providers emphasised a lack of emergency accommodation that is designed and delivered specifically for young people, and some areas reported a reduction in its availability. Ten providers said that their area had no emergency accommodation at all. In other cases, Nightstop was the only available emergency service for young people not meeting priority need criteria under relevant homelessness.

Emergency accommodation in Cornwall only seems to be either Newquay or St Austell. This can create issues for young people at the lower end of the country, isolating them from friends and family, greatly affecting their mental health in turn (Provider respondent).

Emergency accommodation is over capacity, Nightstop is not always able to cater for young people with more challenging lifestyles and issues (Provider respondent).

A few young people reported staying temporarily in large generic all-age emergency accommodation services, and described these as lacking adequate support and privacy.

There was support, but it wasn't like here, where you have support in an office, it was like they would float in and out, but they would only float in and out once a week. So you were sort of left to your own devices, but yes, so there was lots of people in there who probably shouldn't have been there, but because you got each other into trouble (Young person).

It is encouraging to note that some homelessness service providers were focusing on improving their emergency provision so as to effectively support young people in their transition through the Pathway and preparation for independent living (see case study 4).

Historically I believe, emergency accommodation can feel like a holding pen without clear expectations other than a safe place. We hope to use our emergency beds to assess and give young people access to support and an understanding of expectations when they access a long-term supported accommodation. By making them aware of what to expect, this will hopefully reduce the amount of failed tenancies (Homelessness provider respondent).

Case Study 4: Providing supported emergency accommodation for young people

Castle House offers short-stay supported emergency accommodation for young people aged 16-18, with a focus on preventing homelessness and helping them to develop skills to move forward in their lives. The service is provided by Bolton Young Person's Housing Scheme (BYPHS).

Castle House provides safe emergency accommodation with tailored support for up to 10 young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In addition to the help provided by support workers at Castle House, each young person is assigned a BYPHS mentor, who will get to know them and their individual needs. Staff adopt a personalised approach and work in close partnership with an array of statutory and voluntary services, which allows targeted referrals to appropriate services and support to be made. Support staff and mentors also help young people access the specialised support services provided by BYPHS, which includes dedicated on-site sexual and mental health workers.

BYPHS has a range of housing options for young people, including supported tenancies and supported lodgings within the community, as well as self-contained flats with 24-hour support for young people with complex needs. Staff aim to ensure that each young person at Castle House moves on to the tenancy that is most appropriate for their needs.

Young people in a focus group regarded the personalised, informal and caring approach of the staff to be the best aspect of BYPHS services:

Here they actually care because they get to know you... yes, like on an actual level... yes they are going above and beyond, like caring, just communicating and caring and just listening to you instead of writing it down, they don't write anything down. They just do it from their head because they are listening to you. Yes, they will sit down and listen to your problems (Young person).

They just welcomed me... it was super cool like, so I just felt welcome. Every now and then they be knocking. 'Do you want some toast, do you want some food?' Just super caring, so I felt like yes, this is the right place that I've come to. Then two weeks later, I had an interview and I got my own place, yes, so they are just super cool the staff. I think the staff makes a massive difference (Young person).

Castle House operates on principles of choice and control, which allow the young people to make their own decisions about their daily lives and futures while making them feel accepted as they are, despite past risk assessments or chaotic behaviours. Staff emphasised the importance of the "softer" outcomes achieved by the service that may seem trivial, but actually signify significant progress for individuals:

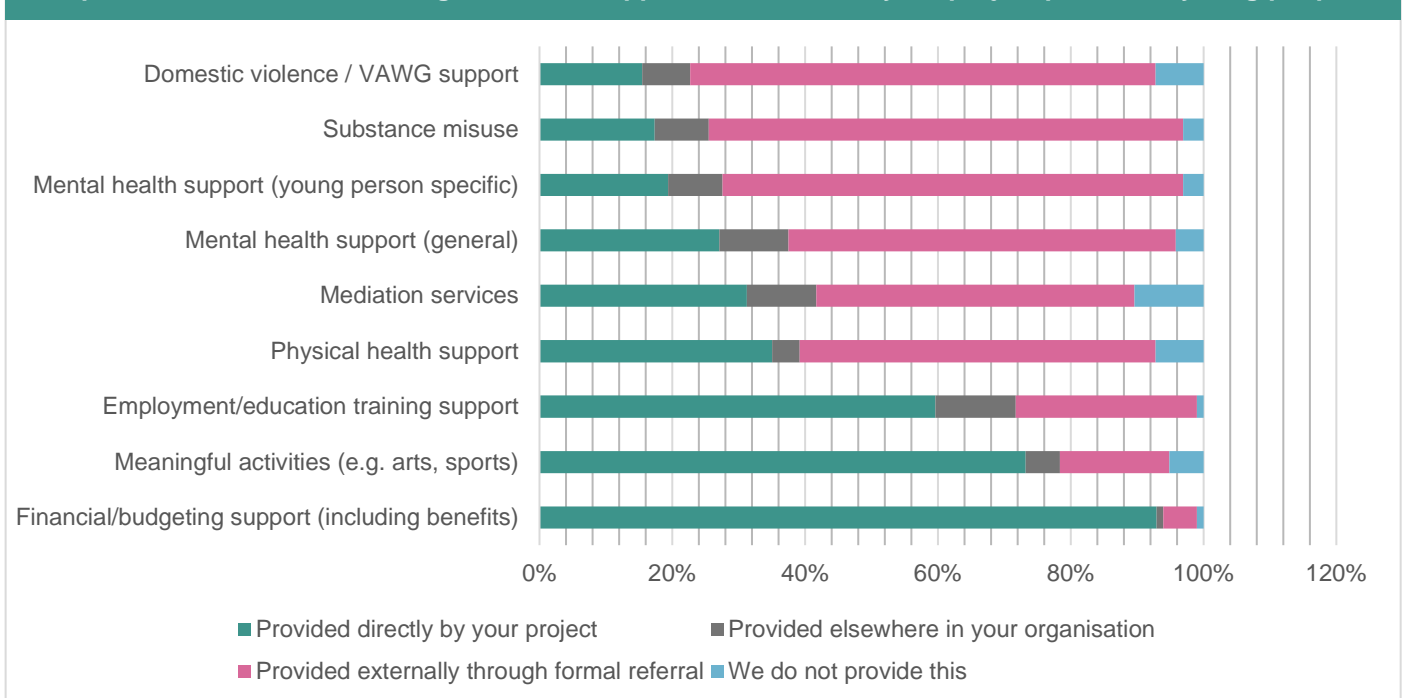
It's not just about moving on to the next project, some people it might be that they don't feel as anxious or smoke as much. Or someone who has never spoken to a mental health worker, by the end of it they've had a few sessions and they've started to feel a bit better because they've started to open up and speaking to people. It's not just about moving on, it's about all the other accomplishments you meet within that as well (Staff member).

Support services

Supported accommodation and other young person projects offer various services to address the needs of the young people and help them develop new skills (Graph 20). These can be provided within structured in-house support programmes on the project's premises or elsewhere in the organisation, or via referrals to external agencies. The young people often considered the range of support services provided to be among the most positive aspects of staying in supported accommodation projects.

'You can be so lost, and the only way, sometimes, is somewhere like this. This is your last opportunity for you to figure out, "Do you know what it is? This is what's going wrong," and you've got the support here to help you do everything you need; from money and mental health, to counselling, to talking. Just to be able to walk out of your door and go downstairs in the morning, and have a cuppa, and have someone to talk to. That's what it is.' (Young person interview)

Graph 20: Which of the following additional support services does your project provide to young people?



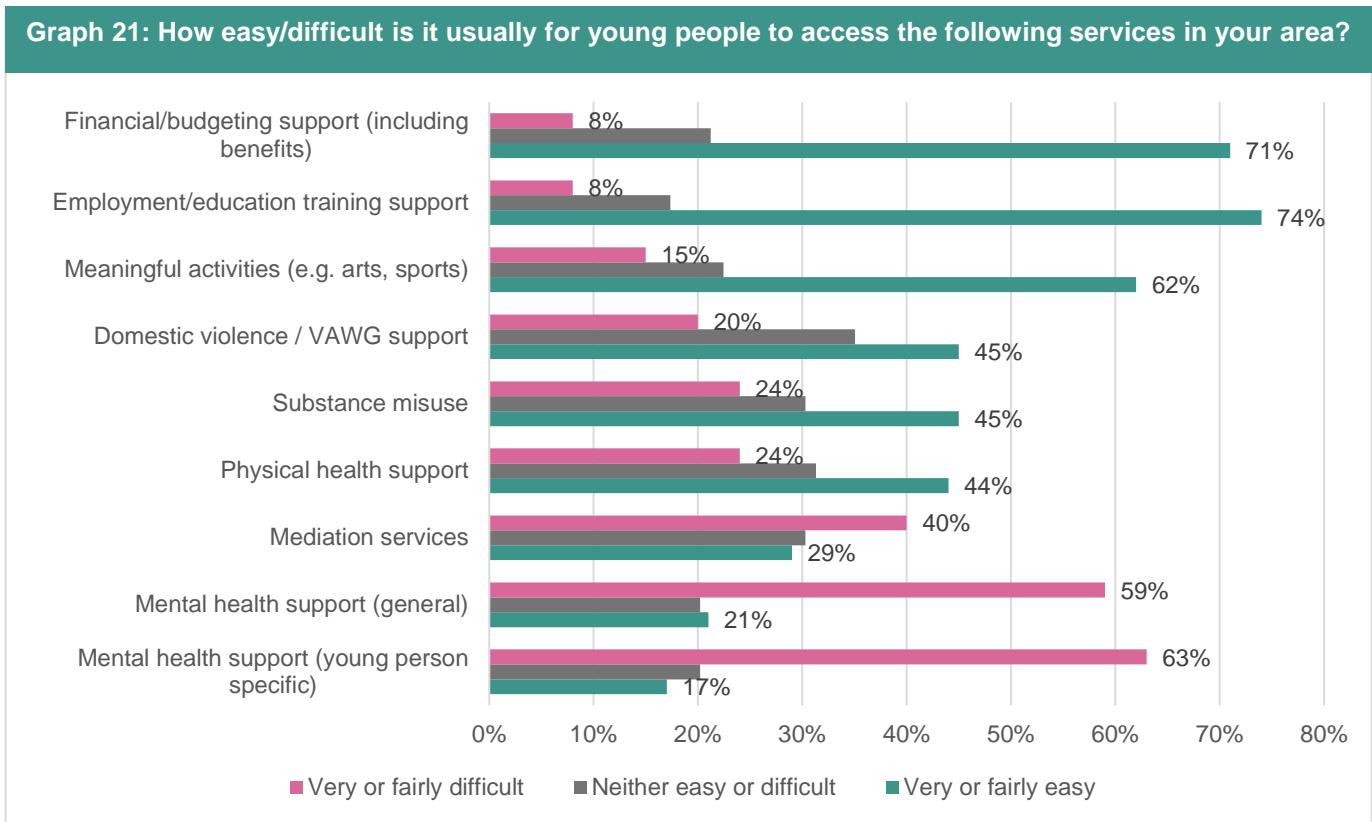
N Homelessness Service Providers: 99

Survey respondents reported that most services were either available on the premises or supplied via external referrals. Very few gaps were identified in regard to the existence of these services, with only a small proportion of respondents stating that mediation (10%), physical health support (7%), and domestic violence support (7%) services were completely unavailable. The findings do, however, suggest that young people may often face barriers in accessing these services (see below).

Financial/budgeting support, meaningful activities, and employment/education training support were most likely to be provided directly by the responding project or by the parent organisation. Domestic violence, substance misuse, and mental and physical health support services were likely to be provided via formal referral to an external agency.

Barriers to accessing services

The findings indicate that young people will face fewer barriers in accessing services that are provided directly by a project or are located within the organisation (Graph 21).



N Homelessness service providers: 98

Most survey respondents stated that it was easy for young people to access meaningful activities (62%), financial/budgeting support (71%), and employment, education and training support (74%). These services are more likely to be provided directly by a project rather than via referral to an external agency (see above).

The respondents most often reported difficulties in accessing general (59%) as well as young person specific (63%) mental health services; a finding that is particularly concerning when considering the prevalence of mental health problems among homeless young people (see Chapter 2).

Mental health provision is administered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Adult Mental Health Services, and the transition process between the two can greatly affect whether a young person continues to receive support. Some young people reported that their mental health support terminated when they turned 18, and felt that these restrictions were arbitrary and insensitive of their personal needs.

Yes, she would come here to see me as well, so it was good. I mean I wish they had CAMHS for over 18s or I wish they would allow CAMHS to be for over 18s ... What seems to me is, like, just because I turned 18, they think that makes me an adult. I'm not an adult. I'm still a kid, like I say, I may be really mature, but I had my childhood taken away from me so I do act like a kid quite a lot. I do want to be a kid, because I never got a chance to be one. It does annoy me that they don't do it for over 18s because CAMHS was really good for me (Young person).

Several young people felt that long waiting lists and slow referral processes were key barriers in accessing mental health services. As highlighted in Homeless Link's 2017 *Annual Review*, high thresholds for support, problems of dual diagnosis, and limited service capacity further contributes to the significant difficulties homeless people face in accessing these services.⁷² The interviews suggest that these barriers can severely limit young people's ability to move forward in their lives.

Int: What do you think would be the most helpful in helping you to achieve your goals, to be where you want to be next?

I think once I manage, whether it takes years, months, weeks, to find something or someone that can help me with my mental health and get that under control ... because it just affects just even getting out of bed. I can't get a job and stuff like that if I can't even get out of bed. So mental health is definitely the main thing that needs to get sorted before I think any of us can really succeed. You can't really be happy with life and sort your life out until you're happy with yourself. When you've got mental health, you're not really happy with yourself unless you get your mental health in a better place (Young person).

Key principles in delivering support

The interviews highlighted certain key principles in delivering services which are fundamental in helping young people achieve positive outcomes.⁷³

Personalisation

Young people shared how in some cases the support they received did not reflect their own feelings or views on what they needed. Feeling that their voice was not being heard, and narratives of inflexible service delivery appeared within young people's stories of accessing a range of specialised services, including anger management, mental health and drugs/alcohol service:

When I first moved here they made me do CBT then, and it wasn't really, I wouldn't say it was massively helpful, because I probably wasn't ready to do it, and I said I'd already done counselling in the past ... but it was all under a thing of I had to engage. So it was basically like I had to do what they wanted me to do to sort of get anywhere, but I was saying to them. But it's because they're the professionals they know best, but I knew what I needed and what I wanted and they just, they didn't listen (Young person).

Earlier research has shown that programmes aiming to prevent youth homelessness and social exclusion are most effective when they listen and respond to the individual's personal needs and views regarding support.⁷⁴

⁷² Ibid Homeless Link, 2017 Annual review

⁷³ The following list is not comprehensive but focuses on certain issues emerging in the interviews.

⁷⁴ Dickens, S. and Woodfield, K. (2004) Evaluating an innovative scheme for preventing youth homelessness, Available at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/evaluating-innovative-scheme-preventing-youth-homelessness>

Young person-led

During the interviews young people repeatedly positioned themselves as the key driver in making positive changes and wanting to take responsibility for their own lives and futures.

I don't know, I, kind of, brought myself out of it more. I brought myself out of it more than the services did, because I'm a very independent person. I just - I get so far, and then I think, "I don't need anyone's help, I'll do it myself," and then I just - I don't know (Young person)

It was easy. To make the decision [to make a change] was hard, and to do it all was the scariest, scariest thing I've ever done in my life. The decision, when it clicks in your head, you're, like, "I need to do it." It just needs to be done. I'm like, "I keep going like this, I'll lose everything" (Young person).

These responses illustrate the importance of services using asset-based and client-led approaches to help individuals build on their own strengths, abilities, and aspirations.

Tailored to young people

Young people's routes into, through, and out of homelessness often differ from those of adults, therefore responses should also be different. This is somewhat reflected in the relatively high proportion of youth-specific accommodation services currently operating throughout England.⁷⁵ The interviews with young people suggested that referrals to external services should be to those tailored to their specific needs. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, young people are more likely to seek help for cannabis use rather than for hard drugs (which are more often associated with adults⁷⁶).

I had to go to town. I'd go to this little centre thing. But obviously, they deal with a lot of smack and crack ... You walk into a place like that, you look, and you see them all scratching, like, "I need my morphine." That I understand. Those people need that help. Mine technically wasn't like that. Cannabis was always my main deal (Young person).

Positive and trusting young person/staff relationships

During the interviews many young people reflected on positive relationships and interactions with support staff being the best part of accessing support and the key to effective services. These relationships were seen as crucial in facilitating and encouraging access to appropriate services and new opportunities, and in encouraging emotional healing.

'When I moved out of there and came in here, it did get a lot better, because I've got a proper home and somewhere I can call my home. I was allowed visitors and my boyfriend, at the time, was allowed to stay. I don't know, because you've got a support worker and stuff, when you've got a flat. Mine was ___ and she was really good. I think she helped me out a lot. I don't know, it's nice, because you sit down once a week, don't you? Having key worker sessions. It's nice just to vent off and just get all your problems out the way (Young person).

They're really good here in the sense in that your support worker will monitor how you're doing mentally, physically, financially. Basically, if you're struggling anywhere, they'll be like

⁷⁵ Ibid Homeless Link, 2017 Annual review

⁷⁶ Ibid Watts, B., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015)

“well, you do realise, actually, there’s this place that can help. We can contact them and get you involved (Young person).”

Effective support services are crucial to helping young people address their problems and develop the skills needed to progress to independent living and within their lives. The next chapter explores the options, support and challenges associated with moving on from homelessness services.

Chapter 6. Moving on from homelessness

The last element of the Positive Pathway Model covers the provision of various safe, decent and affordable move-on housing options, which is critical in helping young people move away from homelessness. This chapter explores the process of moving on.

Key findings

- Returning home was identified as the most common move on destination among young people accessing services. A move to private rented accommodation was the least common.
- A rent deposit or cashless bond scheme (87%) is the most common move-on scheme available.
- 78% of homelessness service providers and 83% of the local authorities continue to support young people once they have moved on from their services. This usually takes place on an informal basis.

Move-on destinations

Local authorities and providers were asked to rank the most common destinations that young people moved on to after accessing their services. Following successful mediation, family-based support, and/or time out at services offering respite (such as Nightstop), some young people are able to return to the family home or home of their primary care giver. A return to family and friends was identified by providers and local authorities as the most common move-on destination of the young people accessing their services.

Housing association accommodation was ranked as the second most common move-on destination, and local authority-owned housing as the third. Although local authorities in some areas will allow young people priority status for accessing properties in the social rented sector, in other areas there are very limited opportunities for young people to access the social rented market.⁷⁷

Affordable housing for young people who are ready to live independently is a key gap in provision in many areas. Within this study, the private rented sector (PRS) was identified as the least common move-on destination for young people. The difficulties that young people face in accessing the PRS are well documented and are associated with a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, rents being above local housing allowance levels, and discrimination from landlords.⁷⁸

The Youth Voice advisors asked for a sixth 'did not move on' question be added to the survey. It is encouraging, however, to note that local authorities and providers listed this option as being the least common.

Move-on schemes

Homeless Link's 2017 *Annual Review* showed that people accessing supported accommodation face significant barriers to moving on from these services and into independent housing.⁷⁹ These barriers include the lack of affordable accommodation, the lack of accommodation at the LHA rate, and the unwillingness of

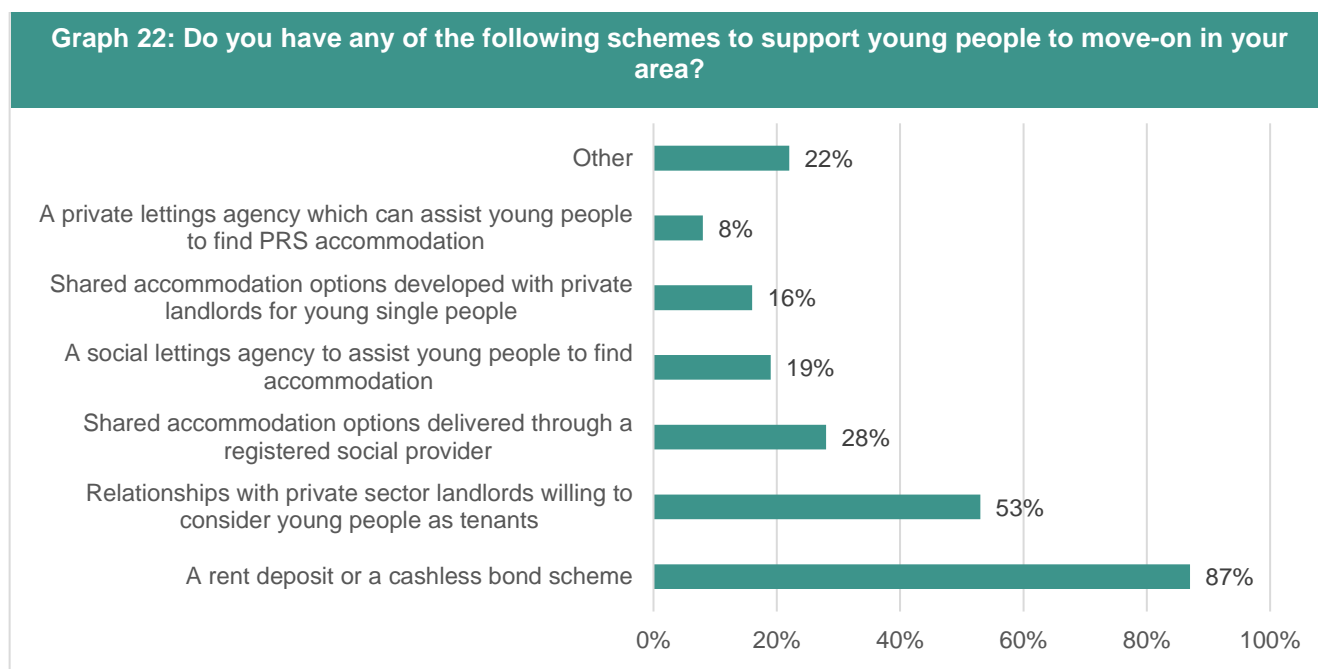
⁷⁷ Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

⁷⁸ Ibid McCoy, S. (2018) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two.

⁷⁹ Ibid Homeless Link (2017) Annual Review

some private sector landlords to rent to benefit claimants and/or people who have experienced homelessness.⁸⁰

The findings from this survey indicate that local authorities employ a range of schemes to attempt to stimulate the PRS and increase its accessibility for young homeless people (Graph 22).



N: 60

The most common scheme consisted of a rent deposit or cashless bond scheme (87%), helping young people secure a property without having to fund the upfront costs themselves. A significant proportion of the responding providers (53%) also reported developing relationships with private sector landlords who are willing to consider young people as tenants. Despite the availability of this type of PRS schemes and the efforts of some local authorities to stimulate the market to help young people, accessing appropriate and affordable move-on accommodation remains the most challenging aspect of the Positive Pathway Model.⁸¹

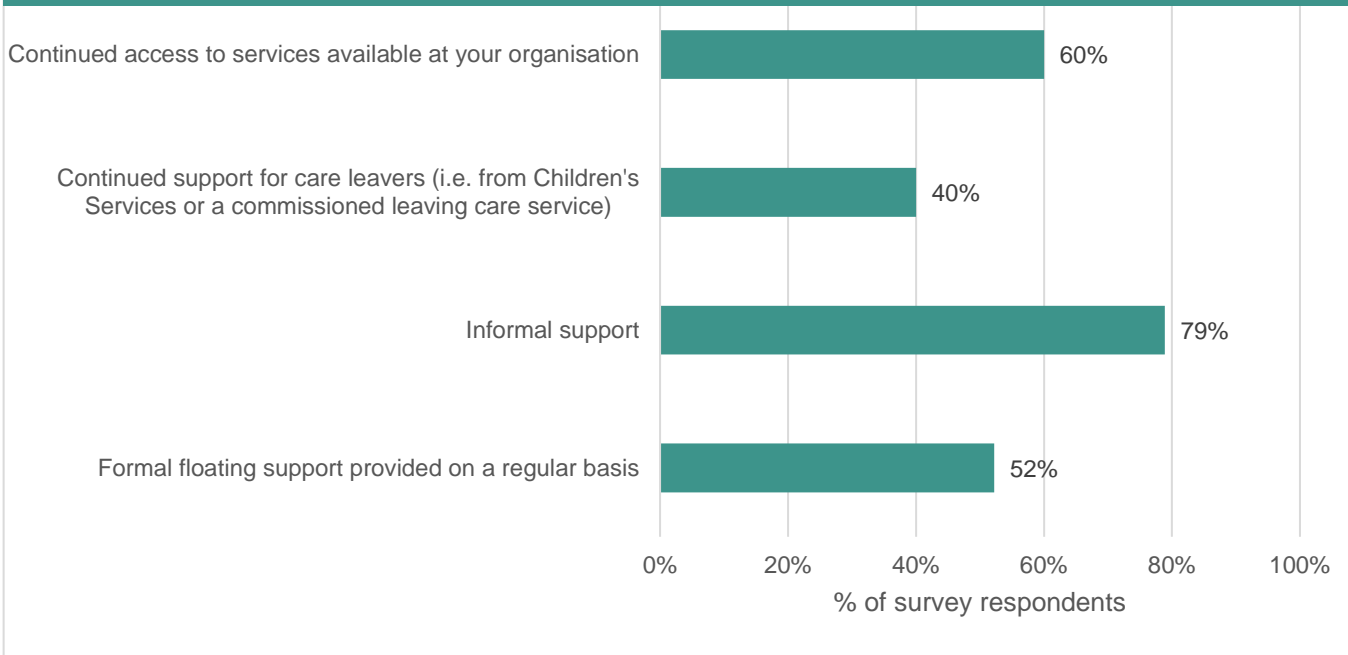
Move-on support

78% of the responding providers and 83% of the local authorities continue to support young people once they have moved on from their services. The findings suggest that move-on support generally consists of informal support such as contact on an ad hoc basis (Graph 23).

⁸⁰ Ibid Homeless Link (2017)

⁸¹ Green, S., McCarthy, L. and Pattison, B (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Available at: <http://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/ouexpertise/positive-pathway-model-rapid-evaluation-its-impact>

Graph 23: Which support services are available for young people who have moved on from your service? (providers)



N: 90

Formal floating support – such as visits at least every three months - was provided by over half of the survey respondents. A significant number of respondents (60%) also allowed continued access to their services, which could include continued use of general drop-in sessions, or advice and employment services. The most common form of move on support occurs on an informal basis, for example ad hoc calls to young people once they have exited the service.

Conclusion

Young people face multiple forms of structural disadvantage, and efforts to tackle youth homelessness are taking place within a social and economic context in which young people's opportunities are increasingly constrained. Although the actual scale of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, the situation has by no means improved since the last *Young and Homeless* study, with various local authorities and homelessness service providers reporting an increase in the number of young people sleeping rough in their local areas.

The findings show that the principal causes of youth homelessness have remained largely the same, with the majority of people becoming homeless because parents or care-givers are unable or unwilling to provide accommodation. However, the findings indicate that family relationship breakdowns result from a complex interplay of structural factors, system failures, and personal circumstances. Although headline statistics on family relationship breakdowns tend to imply that youth homelessness has one single cause or key driver, homelessness often results from a cumulative impact of a number of factors.

The availability of suitable housing is key to providing a way out of youth homelessness. The success of local authorities and homelessness service providers in preventing youth homelessness and ensuring quick solutions when it does occur, depends on the availability of a range of housing options. Despite the various measures employed to assist move-on from services, young people experience significant difficulties when trying to access appropriate and affordable housing.

One particularly concerning finding is the association between recent welfare benefit reforms and the significant difficulties that young people face in accessing and sustaining accommodation (which can in turn increase the risk of homelessness). The findings of this study indicate a need for the Government to urgently consider the disproportional impact of various welfare benefit policies on young people (such as the use of benefit sanctions). With Universal Credit still being rolled out nationally, there is a need for a thorough examination of any specific exclusionary effects on both the wellbeing and outcomes of young people, and on national and local policies aiming to tackle youth homelessness.

People who become homeless at a young age are more likely to experience difficulties later in life. This highlights the importance of prevention initiatives for those most at risk of homelessness, and approaches that address the problems before a young person reaches crisis point are particularly important. The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has a key role to play in tackling homelessness at a national level, and in improving prevention, advice and information for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Most of the young people we interviewed recounted difficult or adverse childhood experiences, showing that the experience of homelessness often reflects earlier experiences of disadvantage and hardship. This underlines a need for an emphasis on early intervention, including holistic support that addresses not just the young person, but the whole family.

Although operating within a challenging environment of funding cuts and high levels of demand, the study shows that local authorities and service providers still offer a range of services and options to meet the diverse needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The Positive Pathway Model plays a key role in ensuring that scarce resources are used effectively and that local authorities and their partners work strategically and collaboratively to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people. Opportunities to embed this model further must be taken.

Based on the findings from this year's report, the National Youth Voice and Homeless Link suggest the following key recommendations.

Recommendations developed with the National Youth Voice

The National Youth Voice is organised by the charity St Basils, and consists of young people aged 16-25 who have experienced homelessness. Homeless Link consulted with the Youth Voice during the design and development of the project, and the group also provided practical recommendations for policy makers and practitioners. These recommendations have been supplemented by additional asks from Homeless Link.

Access to appropriate and affordable housing options

A range of housing options is crucial to ensure a planned move for young people leaving care or the family home. Affordable accommodation options are also key to helping young people to move positively and quickly out of homelessness.

The NYRG recommends

- Adequate crash pad facilities should be provided to meet young people's immediate temporary accommodation needs.

Homeless Link recommends

- Government needs to recognise that current levels of truly affordable housing fall short of demand, and increase investment in the supply of low cost housing options, including shared accommodation.

Providing an effective welfare safety net

Adequate welfare support is crucial to both prevent homelessness and ensure young people can leave it behind in the long term.

Homeless Link recommends

- The Government considers the disproportional impact of various welfare benefit policies on young people (including the use of benefit sanctions) and takes action to mitigate any risks of homelessness for young people.
- The Government reviews and lifts the freeze on LHA levels for Shared Accommodation and addresses the shortfalls in LHA rates and market rents so that they reflect the reality of the local rental market.

Preventing youth homelessness

With youth homelessness often resulting from problems occurring within the family home, a whole-family approach is key to preventing homelessness.

The NYRG recommends

- Services should focus on setting goals and provide a range of meaningful activities to help young people build positive social networks.
- Family based mediation and counselling services should be provided at the earliest opportunity, focusing on helping young people and care givers to build bridges.
- Stigma and stereotypes of homelessness must be tackled by raising awareness of the bigger picture.

Homeless Link recommends

- Every local authority should implement a Positive Pathway model to ensure that young people can access accommodation and support appropriate to their personal needs.
- As the Government reviews the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act over the next 12 months, it commits to specifically identifying effective practice, and any challenges to preventing youth homelessness under the provisions of the Act.

Intervening early for those most at risk

The identification of and targeted support for young people most at risk of homelessness has a key role to play within the prevention of youth homelessness.

The NYRG recommends

- A multi-disciplinary approach should provide holistic support to meet young people's diverse needs and problems prior to crises occurring.
- Advice and support services should be available for families and young people who are at high risk of becoming homeless.

Investment in mediation services

Despite the importance of mediation, this report has highlighted significant gaps in the quality and availability of these services.

The NYRG recommends

- The language used to describe mediation services needs to be changed to reduce stigma and encourage uptake by young people and their families .
- Mediators should use activities to allow family to spend quality time together, and avoid only delivering services in formal or home-based environments.
- Mediation should be made available and offered as a standard option to young people at an early stage in every local authority area.

Homeless Link recommends

- The Government and local authorities should increase investment in and improve young people's access to mediation services, and use these services to address problems before young people reach crisis point.

Accessing mental health services

The findings show that young people face significant difficulties in accessing both general and young person-specific mental health services.

The NYRG recommends

- The culture of accessing and delivering services needs to change. Waiting times should be reduced and adequate funding and well-trained staff should be provided.
- A trigger system to allow non-homelessness agencies to identify 'at risk' young people should be developed. Warnings could be passed to appropriate housing services to be followed up in a sensitive, respectful and efficient way.
- Social media should be better used to raise awareness of services and improve their accessibility.

Effective support services

In helping young people to achieve positive outcomes, it is essential that services are tailored to the individuals' own views on what they need.

The NYRG recommends

- Providers must engage young people with lived experience in the design and delivery of their services.
- Providers should offer a peer mentoring programme, engaging young people who have experienced that service.

- Young people should be referred to appropriate external services to ensure their needs are met.
- Homelessness should be humanised by ensuring that accommodation services are homely and staff connect with young people as people.

Homeless Link recommends

- As the Government considers responses to its proposals on the future funding of supported housing, we urge them to ensure that the final proposals will protect and sustain supported housing services for young people experiencing homelessness.

Moving on from homelessness

The NYRG recommends

- When exiting a service, young people should be asked what/if ongoing support they need.
- All service providers should offer flexible phased out support, delivered during a clear transition period.
- During the transition period staff should maintain regular contact with young people and not wait for young people to initiate contact.

Homeless Link recommends

- Every young person moving on from homelessness services into an independent tenancy should be offered a personalised, flexible package of support that is non time-limited. This will require additional investment from central Government.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for services working directly with people experiencing homelessness, or living with housing with health, care and support needs. Representing over 700 organisations across England, we work to improve services through research, training and guidance, and to promote 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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