

young homeless people

*speaking for
themselves*



SYHN
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A Scottish Youth Housing Network report of the views of young people

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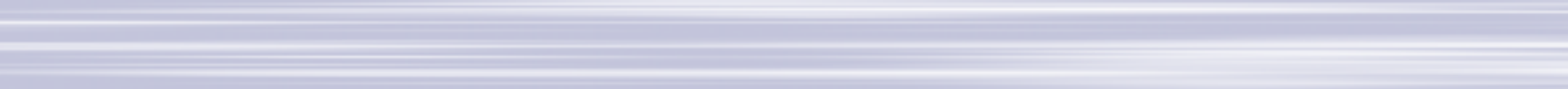
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Foreword

On behalf of the Scottish Youth Housing Network I would like to thank all the young people who participated in this research. Too often their voice is not heard when planning, developing and managing services supposedly aimed at meeting their needs. In addition the Network would also like to thank the Scottish Executive for funding this research. Thanks also go to the local authorities and service providers in the three local authority areas who co-operated in contacting young people and bringing them together with the researchers.

This survey highlights the strong messages young people who have experienced homelessness have for us. These include strong condemnation of the continuing practice of accommodating young people in bed and breakfast and traditional hostels, the huge differences the attitudes of professionals can make and the severe lack of opportunities young people have had to comment on or get involved in the way services are provided.

The challenge is now on us as service providers to listen to these views and act on them, working alongside young people to ensure we provide services that prevent and tackle the scandal that is youth homelessness.

John Dickie

Scottish Youth Housing Network

“you don’t have your own life if you’re homeless”

Young Homeless People ***speaking for themselves***

This survey was commissioned by the Scottish Youth Housing Network and funded by the Scottish Executive. The SYHN is comprised of individuals and organisations involved in housing and youth work. It exists to improve housing provision for young people by promoting good practice and the sharing of information about policy developments amongst those working in young people’s housing and youth homelessness.

We have sought to accurately represent the variety of responses of the young people we interviewed about their experiences and views of the different services they engaged with while they were homeless. In the body of this report we can only give a selection of views. (Further information is contained in the appendix.) This report has been written in a way which principally reflects the views of the young people we interviewed. We did not look separately at the particular services which young people were using.

The remit

To establish the views of a sample of young people who are or have been homeless on:

- the different roles played by services in meeting their needs;
- the effectiveness of services in meeting their needs;
- where services can be improved and how;
- any gaps in service provision;
- the extent and value of opportunities for user involvement.

Methodology

Three local authority areas were selected in different parts of Scotland; one urban, one rural and one which was a mix. Each authority was approached and asked to help us identify up to 10 young people for interview aged between 16 and 25 who were homeless or who had been homeless. The local authorities also helped us identify other services which are in contact with young people experiencing homelessness. These organisations were also asked to contact young people for interview particularly in group settings. An explanatory leaflet outlining the purpose of the research was circulated along with return slips for those young people interested in being interviewed.

The survey

Over a period of two weeks 57 young people were interviewed. Twenty one were seen individually and 36 in groups. (A further 16 had to withdraw from the survey for reasons such as health, other interviews, appointments etc.). The interviewees were asked a number of questions to establish the range of services used, what they felt about these services, whether they had been consulted on service provision and their views on what could help other young people experiencing homelessness.

Characteristics of the young people surveyed

Of the fifty-seven young people surveyed:

- 49 were aged between 16 to 21, with 21 aged between 16 and 17;
- 37 were male and 20 female;
- all but 4 described themselves as being white Scottish;
- 49 were single;
- 14 had their own tenancy. The others, apart from one who was roofless, were living in different forms of temporary accommodation including a night shelter, supported lodgings, and staying care of.

(for a full breakdown of the statistical information see appendix).

Of the twenty-one young people who were interviewed individually:

- 11 of the 21 had educational qualifications gained at school while one gained further qualifications after leaving school;
- 14 of the 21 had been excluded from school at some point;
- 20 of 21 interviewed individually were registered with a general medical practitioner (GP) while one was in the process of registering;
- 6 of the young people had the same GP as they had had before they became homeless;
- of the other 15 young people 13 had changed on moving area with only 2 transferring because they did not like their GP;

“there are lots of different reasons for being homeless. My dad kicked me out once. Another time my girlfriend and I had a flat (private landlord), it got flooded out and the landlord wouldn’t sort it out so we had to sleep rough”

- of the 21 young people only 9 had no care background;
- of the 12 that had a care background 9 spent time in children’s homes (one of whom had had eight different placements in a period of a year and a half);
- 6 of the 12 had spent time with foster parents;
- 2 of the 12 had been in a secure unit and 2 had had a supervision order.

In both the group settings and in the individual interviews we asked the young people if they currently saw themselves as being homeless. Of those who responded, twenty-eight said that they did see themselves as being homeless. One young person explained that he felt homeless **“in a way. I feel restricted, watched over all the time”**. Twenty one young people did not see themselves as being homeless and of this group, twelve young people were staying in different forms of temporary accommodation including supported lodgings and young persons supported accommodation, as one of them commented **“I suppose I am technically but I don’t see myself as homeless”**.

The different roles played by services in meeting needs

While a variety of services can play a key role in the lives of young people experiencing homelessness, ranging across services such as housing, education, health, and careers, particular services can assume greater significance because a young person is homeless, for example housing providers and support services.

Local authority housing services

Local authorities have statutory duties towards certain groups of young people if they are homeless under the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. Other services are developed to specifically meet the needs of young homeless people, for instance some supported accommodation services. We found from the survey clear differences emerging in young people's experience of the performance of different local authority services which they had been in contact with.

While the vast majority of the young people in the survey had been in contact with their councils and had been interviewed, it was much more difficult to know with any certainty what the outcome was in terms of their formal homelessness status. Few said they had received any written notification of their council's decision and in some instances what they had received from the council seemed to be only a record of their housing application.

While many of those interviewed were found homelessness accommodation and thus would have been found to be in priority need, only one interviewee actually seemed to know the outcome of his assessment. He said he was found to be **"intentionally homeless"**.

Other young people recalled the outcome although they did not recollect any formal process. One said **"I didn't get an interview just given a booklet"**; another said **"when I was 18 they said they couldn't help me"**.

In two authorities in particular we would question whether some of the young people who approached the authority were given any formal assessment. While some did not know if they were assessed in terms of the homelessness legislation, for others it appeared that they were not. Comments included: **"I spent three years on the list and never saw a homeless person's officer"**; **"I went to the local office, they said I had to phone the main office. I phoned from there and on the phone they took my name and told me to come back next week. When I went back they said they had nothing for me"**.

Some young people did receive formal assessments and two appeared to have been assessed jointly by housing and social work under both the homelessness legislation and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 **"the whole approach was to plan for independence, it wasn't just treated as a homeless situation"**.

Social work services

Social work provides support services to vulnerable people and to those where they have a duty, for example probation. Some services may be contracted out to the voluntary or private sectors. Social work have aftercare responsibilities towards those young people who have been 'looked after' (i.e. in care). They may also have duties towards other young people, for example if they appear to be a 'child in need' in terms of the Children (Scotland) Act and have duties under the community care legislation.

Apart from sometimes carrying out joint assessments with housing in one authority, where they also used assessment flats, there was little other direct evidence from the young people of social work providing assessments under the Children (Scotland) Act. In one area a 16 year old young woman approached social work as she was trying to leave a violent mother only to be told that she would get no help from them **“because I was still at home, 16 and still at school”**. In a different area social work provided a supported accommodation team which not only provided support to young people who had left care but also to other vulnerable young homeless people.

Other housing providers _____

In all the local authority areas there was a range of accommodation which the young people we surveyed used. All used B&B to a greater or lesser extent, and supported lodgings (although in one area supported lodgings are sometimes referred to as B&B). Supported lodgings are temporary highly supported forms of accommodation where the young person lives with a family who provide support. Services for young people were offering supported accommodation variously in communal settings and in more independent accommodation both specifically for young people and for a mixed age range. In one area in particular we interviewed young people who had stayed in ‘traditional’ style hostels and a night shelter. There was also the provision of mainstream housing.

Benefits, training and employment _____

These services may provide the only access to income maintenance for young homeless people. Under-18s must register with the Careers Service first; all unemployed young people must show they are actively seeking both work and training before they can qualify for any benefit. Benefit sanctions can severely penalise a young person falling foul of the rules as with one who had been allocated a flat and was finding it difficult to live there because of a lack of furniture **“I was refused furniture under the 26 week rule – not a planned resettlement”**. Another young person interviewed had had no money for six weeks.

Other services _____

Other services that played an important role included support services, those provided by the agencies where the young people were staying and by other specialist services such as addiction and psychiatric services. In some areas outreach workers were important in linking young people into services.

The effectiveness of services in meeting needs

As with all services there is a variety of responses by service users as to their effectiveness. This is no less true of young people who experience homelessness. However there were services which were viewed consistently in a very positive light, such as supported lodgings. In relation to some of the other services the dominant view was a negative one, as appears to be the case with the Benefits Agency.

Council services _____

As the survey progressed it became apparent that a clearer, targeted and more co-ordinated approach to service delivery, with distinct and well publicised information and access points would best serve the interests of young people.

Local authority housing services _____

The vast majority of young people we interviewed had been in contact with housing services at some point. Many seemed unclear about the process and the outcome of their contact **“they could have explained things a lot better”**. Their experience overall was not particularly satisfying, although in one local authority area, the young people interviewed expressed more understanding of what was happening to them.

“I was not ready for independence and being alone in a flat, it did not work out well – I found out the difference between being lonely and alone”

“the homeless officer tried to make a prat out of me, he knew he had the power”

In all three authorities the way young people felt they were treated often came down to individual members of staff **“the first woman was nice but the man with the badge and the title was a complete idiot, he kept bringing the wrong forms like housing benefit when I didn’t even have a house”**. Another young person commented that the staff were mostly very helpful but one staff member had said to him **“you will never get another house as you are a criminal”**.

It was clear from a number of the comments made about staff that there are issues to be tackled by local authorities about attitudes which some seem to hold towards young homeless people **“they treat you like dirt”**; **“they are cheeky to you”**. When young people are treated fairly it is clearly noticed and appreciated, **“the staff were very nice, polite and helpful and supportive”**; **“they can’t do enough for you”**

Again the comments on the advice received was mixed, with some finding the advice useful and others not and some young people feeling that their particular needs went unrecognised. Others said they appreciated the advice given in hindsight, rather than at the time **“at the time it felt like a lot of mince but now I can see the sense”**. However for many others the quality of the advice and assistance left a lot to be desired particularly where the local authority was not securing accommodation for them, **“me and my girlfriend contacted the council. They said since we didn’t come from there, there was nothing they could do for us. My girlfriend started crying and they told us to stop greetin’ and get out”**. Another young person who approached the council while roofless was told, **“that’s Glasgow’s problem”**.

The lack of appropriate and useful information was raised by a number of young people **“you need to know the right questions to ask”**. A few said they were only given a list of B&B or booklets with lists of housing providers, **“they gave us a leaflet with hostels and homeless units in it. They didn’t offer to telephone anybody to see what was available. They didn’t tell us anything worth hearing, said it was our ain fault”**.

Some young people commented on the lack of choices over where they could be referred to for accommodation: **“they never tell you what’s available”; “they don’t let on, don’t tell you, it is as if they are hiding something”**. One young woman who wanted to move away from her family, but was not told of any other options, said **“I would have liked information about other projects outside** (her immediate local area)“.

Some young people had been previously rehoused but their tenancy had broken down. Amongst those we surveyed two had lost their flats when they were imprisoned. One gave up a tenancy to move back into supported accommodation, **“the outreach worker got me a house through the council but it was awful, it was damp. I complained and they said they couldn’t do anything about it. I had to stay there a month – the notice period – and then come back here”**. Another said **“I had a house for 3 months but I went to pieces and I had to come back”**. One young person had been allocated a tenancy but could not furnish it as he was not eligible for a social fund loan.

Social work services _____

We asked young people if they had a care background or any other contact with social work. Of those that answered over half (26) had been in care at some point and a further 23 young people had had some form of contact with social work since they were sixteen though not all of them had a previous history of care. The range of contact with social work included assistance from specialist services in one authority (a supported accommodation team), a small number had a probation officer, two of those who had been in children’s homes kept in contact with the ‘homes’ and some of the young people had been in contact with general social work services at some stage.

On balance young people’s views of social work were more negative than positive. On the positive side the supported accommodation team (a specialist team which has a lot of experience working with young people) was a well-liked service

as was the probation service. Where social work provided practical help this was appreciated **“I wouldn’t have known how to go about it – sorted somewhere to stay which was really important”** whereas other aspects of social work approach was not viewed positively **“they’re no use for emotional help. They try a bit too much, hurt a person rather than help them. They’re alright for practical help”; “I’m never comfortable with social work, they’re always trying to figure you out”**.

Two young people commented on approaching social work because of problems in the family home and neither felt they received any help. One had contacted social work just before he became 16 as he was on the verge of being put out by his family, **“they said because I was nearly 16 they couldn’t do anything”**.

There were indications that where social work services were delivered by specialist young person’s teams they were felt to be more practical and accessible. One young person who was very critical of social work did not identify a particular support service he said he valued as being a social work service.

Other accommodation services _____

There were at least twenty different accommodation services across the three local authority areas which were being used by young people experiencing homelessness. These ranged from a night shelter, bed and breakfast, supported accommodation specifically for young people, both in flats with visiting support and in communal settings, communal supported accommodation for

“after having a confrontation with staff I phoned round some guest houses. No one would take people like us – people like us don’t stand a chance in society”

mixed age groups, ‘traditional’ hostels and supported lodgings. There were also a couple of young people living care-of and some who had moved into their own tenancies. None of those interviewed who were living in communal type accommodation were in single sex accommodation.

Of all the types of accommodation, the more ‘traditional type’ hostels were seen as having the worst standards **“it was disgusting”; “it was an old building with rubbish all over the place and the stairs were smelly”,** and the night shelter, **“there is a fear of coming to places like this, its full of old guys. Because you’re frightened you stay on the streets”; “staying here is degrading, it’s like being in the gutter”**.

Over the years a number of reports and studies have highlighted the general inappropriateness of using bed and breakfast establishments as a form of temporary accommodation. One sixteen-year-old woman was placed in an establishment with older single homeless men. Another 17-year-old young woman described being placed in a B&B where two residents in the next room were **“into S&M”**; where there was a **“pervert who kept trying to look into the shower”** and where **“residents with learning disabilities had to do all the cleaning”**.

Overall the experiences of young people who had stayed in B&B was not a positive one **“It was pure minging,”** said one. A 16-year-old who had just become homeless from the family home said **“it was a nightmare”**. Another commented **“it was bloody crap, terrible furniture, food terrible and lots of rules”**.

(Note in one council the term B&B is sometimes used to describe a supported lodgings arrangement, we have included those comments below.)

Supported accommodation services ___

Twenty-eight of the young people interviewed were living in some form of supported accommodation. Overall, these services were valued, with many young people saying there should be more of them. But for those living within a mixed age group service it was clear that the age differences could create some difficulties: **“the old yins shouldn’t be in here wi us, they should be in an old folks home, or Carstairs, or in care, but no here”**; **“the older folk complain about us, and we complain about them”**.

A few people also raised the difficulties experienced in living with people with drug dependencies, **“for a guy like me who doesn’t use drugs and is surrounded by those that do it’s no use”**.

On the whole support staff were viewed as being helpful **“even when the worker moved on the next one was just as amazing”**; **“the staff were cracking”**; **“they help you if you want, but try not to make you too dependent on them. I was too dependent on the support worker I had**

“it’s good to have someone who is not going to judge you”

before”; **“it’s good to have someone who is not going to judge you”**; **“support workers fight for you, even at 8 o’clock at night there was somebody to turn to”**.

However, there were some criticisms of staff **“walking about at night”**; **“knocking at your door a lot”**. One commented **“she could get a job in prison”**; **“some of the staff are a bit above themselves”**.

Other criticisms tended to centre around the structures, systems or rules imposed. For some young people what seems to dominate is the organisational or management needs rather than those of the individual **“there’s nothing private here, there’s CCTV all over, it’s like a prison”**.

Where some rules may have been developed in response to past incidents they tend not to have been revisited or debated with the tenants/residents themselves. Rules which restricted visitors elicited most criticism, **“it’s too strict, you’re not allowed any visitors. My mum came to see me on my birthday, I hadn’t seen her for ages, I couldn’t even let her in the door”**.

Young people recognised the need for rules but did not always agree with some of them. Some felt there were too many, **“it made you feel the lowest of the low”**; others thought the balance was about right, **“the rules are just common sense and they can be flexible”**.

Supported lodgings

All three local authorities used supported lodgings for some young people. This type of accommodation was the one that received the greatest praise by the young people **“supported lodgings was the best thing that social work came up with”**. What seemed to be most appreciated was the family setting and the type of support they receive **“they’re just like a family, just speak to them for help”**; **“great, brilliant, if it was not for her I would not be able to manage”**; **“it’s the type of support you get from your family on a daily basis and it’s very good”**. Also valued was the feeling of independence which the young people said they had **“there’s more freedom and independence. It really feels like a home”**; **“they care for us, they let us get on with it”**.

Benefits and careers services

Seventy percent of young people had something to say about the benefits agency and the way they either viewed the service or the way they were treated.

Overall almost three times as many young people had negative comments to make as positive ones. In one local authority area we encountered only one young person who thought the service was alright. In another authority there were slightly more positive comments, **“excellent”**, than negative.

However many of the young people interviewed felt they had been treated differently because they were homeless **“they think everyone in — — are junkies”**; **“DSS muck you about a lot if you are homeless”**. Several young people also commented on the difficulties they had with the Benefits Agency

“New Deal was a waste of time and the money did not really cover travel, £10 on top of bus money means that you pay to go out to work and the training is poor and badly planned. There’s no real choice”

if they were of no fixed abode: **“sometimes you can’t get money if you don’t have a proper address”**; **“NFA, no giro”**; **“at the job centre if you are signing on every day they think you are scum. They’re not so bad when you have an address. When you don’t have an address they don’t bother doing the job search for you”**.

The benefit regulations created particular difficulties for some young people, several had had their benefit stopped and found it particularly difficult to cope **“the social makes folk steal, because I was 16 there was no income support”**. Another young person commented, **“they gave a loan for my first tenancy but my belongings were all more or less destroyed by someone and I can’t get another loan as the first one is still not paid. They should be more able to react to individual circumstances”**.

A few young people commented on job centres and their responses were mixed, as the following two quotes illustrate **“the job centre has really improved with the New Deal. It is friendly and I feel it is confidential”**, or alternatively **“the job centre is shite an’ all. They should be sacked, people yer own age tellin’ you what tae do – shite”**.

Where the careers service was concerned there was a more limited response as only those aged between 16 and 17 used them. Some young people found them helpful, **“careers helped me find work and the staff were very helpful”** and another, **“they help you get to college”**. However, of those who commented, almost two thirds did so in the negative, **“they should pay more attention to what I want to do not what they want me to do”**; **“the careers people think that all we are good for is stupid training schemes”**.

Other services used by young people

Health

Twenty out of the 21 young people who were interviewed individually were registered with a GP and one was in the process of doing so. Most of the young people who commented on the health services appreciated them. In one instance a young person’s GP wrote to the council which resulted in him accessing accommodation; another’s GP had managed to secure counselling for her, an issue which was not addressed by social work. In one area where two young people were using psychiatric services both found them helpful, **“the psychiatrist was good, made me realise I take drink and drugs to forget things”**.

There were only three young people who said they were using addiction services. Of those, two (in the one local authority area) did not find them a positive experience.

Education services

Of those young people who were individually interviewed, 14 (67%) had been excluded from school **“I was never suspended, always excluded”**; **“it wasn’t my favourite place then, but I have regrets now”**. Education appeared to be an area neglected by many services, **“I sorted out my education problems myself. Education was not seen as important”**.

Several expressed the wish to continue their education, **“I would like to go back to college”**. One young person still at school commented **“school is okay, it has kept me going”**. One of his teachers also helped him when he became homeless. The teacher **“knew a bit what to expect and what questions to ask”**.

Drop-in centres

Many of those interviewed did not use drop-in centres. In some areas few were available. Comments on these related to two areas only and most of those who commented valued the services on offer **“they have everything here, they’re brilliant, they help you with choices”**; **“they never turn you away, they stick up for you”**; **“you give them respect and they respect you back”**. One said **“rubbish, they’re there for students”**.

Outreach and streetwork services

In one area outreach staff seemed to be effective in making contact with young people, by assisting them into accommodation services and in providing follow-on services, **“the outreach workers are good. They help you out in applying for housing, help with furniture, and they still come and see you when you get a house”**.

Participation, consultation, complaints

Nearly half of the young people interviewed said that they had never been consulted about the services they use. For those who had been consulted this was carried out in a variety of ways, by the different agencies. The agencies which most commonly consulted young people were accommodation and support agencies. In only four different accommodation and support services did staff hold meetings with tenants/residents. There were no examples given of residents meetings without staff present.

The issues discussed included rules, **“drugs alcohol and what we’re going to do”**, and practical matters like meals and chores. While some young people found the meetings useful there was a general feeling that they did not really influence the way things were run; **“if you complain about staff attitudes things change for a while then they go back to normal”**. In one service the young people said they would not be listened to if they suggested changes; in another, **“we discussed the rules but it didn’t change anything”**.

One accommodation service did not have any formal consultation systems but the residents felt they could make suggestions to staff. Sometimes they were consulted about certain decisions which would affect them, for instance buying an expensive item for all the residents to use. Another accommodation service asked for young people’s views on the service when they left, like an ‘exit’ interview. In other services there was regular individual consultation with key or support workers. In one service a young person said there had been only one meeting since she moved in, **“they were talking about a problem that happened a month ago, between me and my flat mate, but because it took a month for them to arrange a meeting we had sorted it out between us. She** (the visiting support worker) **was really annoyed”**.

In another service there was the opportunity to meet with the worker and a member of the management committee on an individual basis to raise any issues, which this young person did not take up **“if you don’t want bother then you just keep quiet”**.

A few services provide suggestion boxes to allow young people to give feedback anonymously. In at least one service staff then discussed the suggestions.

Some of the young people had been asked their views about some of the other services that they used. For example, one had had a questionnaire from the benefits agency, one had been involved in making a video about the care system, another had been asked their views from the social work department and another was going to a conference.

Complaints

Of those young people who responded to questions on complaints, more than half said they knew that there were complaints policies in operation though the majority had not made any complaints formally or informally: **“I don’t think the council would listen”**; **“I have wanted to complain about social work lots of times. I would love to hang them up and dry them. I have only ever had one good**

social worker, a woman. It is hard to trust them now. Social work never recognised the problems we children faced in the family even though I ran away several times". Another said, "you should be able to complain as an individual. There is no real possibility of changing bigger things".

Of the few who had made some form of complaints, in two instances nothing had happened "it was not taken seriously enough to do something" and a 16 year old who had complained about his B&B was told "the Council have met its obligations". In another two instances there were positive outcomes. Some of those who said they did not know they could complain said it was because they didn't have any information "the council never said you could complain".

Having a say _____

Most young people would like to have an opportunity to put their views forward across a range of services and issues "nobody asks our views about nothing". Some were unsure of their right or ability to do so "I think it would be a bit cheeky, its not up to me, I wouldn't argue the point but would let them know of anything I disagreed with"; "I would like a say but don't know how".

"I would like to go to the Scottish Parliament and tell them what it is like and for them to try being homeless"

The ways in which they wished to make their views heard varied. Some young people said they would like to use a suggestion box if one was available.

Many young people thought discussion groups, and meetings would all be useful, with one commenting "if I knew it would make a difference".

Questionnaires were also thought of as a useful method, "because you don't need to jump up in front of others and it is confidential" commented one young person. A number were keen on young person led groups. One thought that "it would be good to get young people across Scotland from 16 –21 together in groups"; one said he would like to be asked in a one to one, "to see them in person" while another commented, "I would like to go to the Scottish Parliament and tell them what it is like and for them to try being homeless".

Services – most useful, improvements and gaps

By far the most appreciated assistance which young people received was help with budgeting and benefits. This is particularly important given the very low levels of income which young people have to live off.

Comments such as **“financial help was most useful and being able to speak to someone about your problems”** were not untypical. Other typical comments included **“I would like more help with my finances”**; **“the main problem is money, trying to balance things, I lived on cheap bread for a week”**.

Other forms of help that young people emphasised as being useful were support in general including having someone to talk to and the practical help that workers provide.

Many suggestions were made as to how young homeless people could be further assisted. Most common were the provision of information and advice, and the need for more accommodation for young people.

In particular, that young people should be told about their rights and entitlements and that information should be available at school was mentioned by a number **“more information about organisations and to go where young people go such as off-sales and schools”**; **“young people should learn about benefits and rights you’ve got at school”**.

Advice on budgeting on very little money was also identified by several people. Some felt economically trapped in their situation and felt that young people should have a higher level of income, **“I cannae look for a job while I’m in here. I couldn’t pay the amount the social pays me”**.

Being listened to and being given assistance was identified as important: **“there should be more people to listen to you and give more help. They just put you down and that’s it. I needed to get into trouble before I got any help – because the person who has helped me most is the probation officer. Otherwise you’re just forgotten about”**; **“workers should help people when they are feeling down – you get depressed if you have been thrown out or you are homeless. It is the job of the staff to understand and give help. This is not always recognised”**.

Some felt it would be useful to have someone independent who could talk to them about how things were going (not staff members), or to have somewhere independent to go to. One young person said there should be **“a young people’s service that’s open all the time, with people who’ve been in your shoes to talk to, who are now working”**. Another would have liked someone to act as an intermediary to talk to them and their family about the difficulties they were facing.

The quality of homelessness assistance was raised **“they should get people who are qualified in homelessness”**; **“the way you’re treated as homeless makes a difference”**.

More generally many of the young people felt they were stigmatised or stereotyped because they were homeless, **“the stigma, if you’re well-dressed you can’t be homeless. If your parents are well-off you can’t be homeless”**; **“people look at you differently if you are homeless like when you are applying for a job”**.

Some said it would be useful to have meetings in schools and youth clubs so that young people can know the reality of homelessness and what help is available, **“go into schools to tell them what it is going to be like if you’re homeless”**.

One would have liked someone to act as an intermediary to talk to them and their family about the difficulties they were facing.

Many commented on the need for more accommodation, including supported accommodation, **“there should be a (project like this) in every town”; “there should be decent places for 16 and 17 years olds who are homeless”**.

A suggestion was made as to the best way to develop independent living skills, **“it might be better to go to supported lodgings before young person’s supported accommodation where you face 3 months’ of obligations”**.

“go into schools to tell them what it is going to be like if you’re homeless”

Some wanted a route back into education **“I would go back to school if given a chance”; “I would be interested in going back to try and get qualifications at college – but nobody helps you wi that”**.

Other gaps and improvements suggested were more outreach services, more drop-in centres and an overhaul of resident rules. One said, **“they could change the visitor’s policy to let family in”**; others stressed being able to access leisure services where lack of finances or local facilities prevented them from doing so **“I’d like to use the gym”; “a McDonalds”; “more facilities for young people of 15-20 such as youth clubs”**.

The words of one young person summed up the views of many **“help with money, a roof and rehabilitation for folk who have been sleeping rough and help getting a job”**.

Conclusions

“when politicians are living in retirement homes I hope they are treated as badly as they treat us”

This survey has shown very clearly that young people who have experienced homelessness are very insightful, have much to say about their experience and can express their views ably. Many of the problems were identified by a young person who commented “there are loads of problems which are not being addressed very well. People who work in the Homeless don’t really know how young people feel. They have houses and jobs and they don’t really care. If you don’t go where they say you should, they see it as all your fault – they just don’t have time for people”.

The survey revealed that there was little understanding of the processes involved in approaching the Council for advice and assistance when facing homelessness. This lack of understanding encompassed:

- where they went;
- who they saw;
- what was decided;
- why they ended up in particular services.

Council services in general _____

It appears that Council staff do not fully explain clearly enough what is happening and why it is happening. Many young people feel powerless in this situation and may not be able to fully explain their situation. However much it may add to the workload of Council staff, there is a need for more time to be spent with young people when they approach the Council. This is the first step in enabling a better assessment of the needs of young people and more appropriate placements of young people.

Whilst young people recognised and valued some staff, they also identified poor attitudes from within the same organisations, highlighting the need for ongoing training to enable staff to understand and relate to the needs of young people experiencing homelessness.

Information and access _____

Staff in both statutory and voluntary sector organisations need to know about the full range of services available in their area and to pass on this information to young homeless people to ensure they can exercise choice in where to go and who to see. More generally, there is a clear demand coming from young people for more information and advice which is of a high quality, is accessible and includes access to independent advice.

Support services _____

The young people surveyed clearly found support an important and appreciated service regardless of the setting in which it is delivered. Financial and budgeting help was particularly valued, as was simply having someone to talk to. Many of the young people said there was a need for much more supported accommodation to be available. However they were not uncritical of aspects of this service. Most commonly mentioned were some of the rules in force in many of the supported accommodation projects such as restrictions on visitors and the rules about how often a young person can stay out either late or overnight.

Young people were more positive about support services offered by specialist teams not seen as mainstream social work services, whether managed by the statutory or voluntary sector.

Accommodation standards

Supported accommodation developed specifically for young people contrasted starkly with some of the other forms of accommodation which some had stayed in. A number of young people had either been referred to or had found for themselves homeless accommodation, including B&B and traditional style hostels, which they deemed highly unsuitable with very poor physical standards, poor service or with an unsuitable mix of residents.

“homeless people should be able to go back to the services they use to talk to the young people living there now”

Participation

There were different ways in which some young people could have a say in the services they used. However nearly half had never been consulted in any way. Generally there was little evidence of a systematic approach which would ensure they could have an effective say either individually or collectively in these services. While some of the young people seemed unsure of a more participatory approach, most would like to have a greater say directly in the services they use. The willingness to be involved more also included an interest in being consulted over more general issues of concern to young people.

Recommendations

Plan to improve service standards _____

- Consult young people who have been homeless about their experiences of homelessness and housing and support services.
- Review research findings and statistical information on youth homelessness and young people's housing needs.
- The range and type of services should be based on what young homeless people identify as being the most appropriate. The research found young people were particularly positive about supported lodgings and age based supported accommodation.
- Further explore supported lodgings as a form of transitional accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Stop the use of 'traditional' hostels and bed & breakfast as temporary accommodation for young homeless people recognising that they find this type of accommodation quite unsuitable.
- Training, education and employment services should recognise that they have a role to play in tackling youth homelessness. Particular attention needs to be given to ensure young people experiencing homelessness receive support to access educational opportunities.
- Create services which develop the confidence, skills and opportunities that enable young people who experience homelessness to engage with education, training or work, for example New Futures type services.

Increase choice and flexibility _____

- Ensure that young people are being referred to the most appropriate service through more integrated and holistic assessment procedures in which they are actively involved.
- Offer young people a choice of services when they become homeless.
- Review ways in which services are delivered to ensure that there is a flexible approach e.g. not simply 9 to 5, Monday to Friday so that assistance can be provided to young people when they need it.
- Support provided to young people should reflect their desire to do ordinary, day to day things that other young people do.

Promote access _____

- Ensure that information and advice services are more visible and that information materials are more readily accessible. Develop ways of consulting young people on the best ways of transmitting information and advice.
- Treat young people with respect regardless of their presenting attitude.
- Tackle negative attitudes towards young people held by some staff in organisations to ensure they are not discriminated against for example through training. Monitor impact through regular feedback from young service users.
- Develop ways of working which enable contact to be made with young homeless people where they congregate e.g. through streetwork.

Increase involvement and participation

- Develop imaginative and effective ways of involving young people in the services they use.
- Provide support to young people to ensure they feel able to participate.
- Develop means of consulting young people about their services and ensure that such consultation is meaningful and outcomes are fed back.
- Ensure real changes result from involving and consulting young people.

Equalise opportunities – education, information and advice

- Use exclusion from education only as a very last resort and develop community alternatives to school.
- Pay greater attention to educational aspirations and create opportunities to enable young people to have routes back into the educational system to continue their education.
- Involve education services, and in particular schools, in the provision of information and advice.
- Ensure that independent advice and advocacy services are available to young homeless people.
- Approach services working with young people to disseminate plain English materials on housing rights and benefits information.
- Conduct all housing and homelessness interviews in plain English.
- Produce written assessments and appeals literature in plain English.
- Clearly inform young people, verbally and in writing, of the results of formal homelessness and social work assessments.

Appendix One

Some facts about homelessness

The Scottish Executive's Statistical Bulletin of August 99 shows that for the year Feb 97 to 98 over one quarter of all homelessness presentations in Scotland were from young people under 25. It breaks down as follows:

**Applicant households: Under 18 – 9%.
Those aged 18 to 24 – 17%.**

The total number of applicant households in Scotland for that period was 43,100.

In addition, young people previously looked after by local authorities continue to be particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Research shows that between a fifth and a half of young homeless people have been in care (National Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, 1996) whilst 26% of Rough Sleeper Initiative service users in Scotland have a care background (Interim Evaluation of RSI in Scotland, 1999).

Local authority assessment	One person households Under 18	One person households 18 – 24
Total	4,000	7,500
Homeless		
<i>Priority unintentional</i>	1,600	900
<i>Priority intentional</i>	200	100
<i>Non-priority</i>	300	4,300
Potentially homeless		
<i>Priority unintentional</i>	200	200
<i>Priority intentional</i>	0	0
<i>Non-priority</i>	100	600
Neither homeless nor potentially homeless	800	600
Lost contact	800	700

Extracted from *Applicant Households, by household type and local authority assessment, Scotland 1997-98, Table 18.*

The survey

Over a period of two weeks 57 young people between aged 16 to 25 were interviewed. Twenty one were seen individually, and 36 were interviewed in groups across the three local authority areas. A further 16 young people had to withdraw from the survey for reasons such as health, interviews, appointments etc. Interviewees were asked a number of questions to establish the range of services used, what they felt about the services, whether they had been consulted on service provision, and their views on what could help other young homeless people. Everyone interviewed was promised anonymity, and was given the option of whether or not they wished to reply to any particular questions. The figures below reflect those choices.

Survey statistics

Of the 57 young people interviewed:

It was established that 28 saw themselves as homeless. Twenty one said they were not homeless with twelve of the 21 staying in different forms of temporary accommodation, including supported lodgings and young person's supported accommodation. 8 did not comment.

Age

16 years old	9	(16%)
17 years old	12	(21%)
18 years old	10	(17.5%)
19 years old	3	(5%)
20 years old	7	(12%)
21 years old	8	(14%)
22 years old	1	(1.75%)
23 years old	1	(1.75%)
24 years old	3	(5%)
25 years old	3	(5%)

Gender

65% (37) were male and 35% (20) female

Ethnicity

53 described themselves as white Scottish, four as white European.

Household status

- 50 (87%) were single
- 4 (7%) were with a partner and child
- 2 (3.5%) were with a partner
- 1 was pregnant with a partner

Where staying

Own tenancy	14	(24%)
Supported accommodation – mixed age range	14	(24%)
Supported accommodation for young people	10	(17.5%)
Supported lodgings	10	(17.5%)
Temporary accommodation – type unknown	2	(5%)
B&B	2	(3.5%)
Bail hostel	1	(1.75%)
Night shelter	1	(1.75%)
Roofless	1	(1.75%)
Staying c/o	2	(3.5%)

Employment status

40% of the young people were on job seekers allowance. This included some young people who had either just finished a New Deal course and some who were about to start.

- 6 (10.5%) were in full time employment
- 1 (1.75%) was in part time employment
- 4 (7%) were on New Deal
- 1 (1.75%) was on a training scheme
- 23 (40%) were on Job Seekers Allowance
- 7 (12%) were on JSA severe hardship
- 2 (3.5%) were on JSA sickness

- 1 (1.75%) was on Incapacity Benefit
- 1 (1.75%) was on DLA
- 2 (3.5%) were on Income Support
- 2 (3.5%) were at school
- 1 (1.75%) was at college
- 6 (10.5%) unknown

Of the 21 young people individually interviewed:

Eleven (52%) had educational qualifications all gained at school and one young person had also gained more after leaving school.

Fourteen (67%) had been excluded from school at some point.

Twenty (95%) were currently registered with a GP and one was in the process of registering. Six (29%) had the same GP as when they were homeless and of the other 15, thirteen (87%) had changed because they had moved area. Only two had changed because they didn't like their existing GP.

Nine (43%) had no care background and of the 12 (57%) who did have, nine had spent time in a children's home, six had spent time with foster parents, two had spent time in a secure unit and two had been subject to a supervision order.

Appendix Two

Discussion group interviews

“Nobody asks our views about nothin’”

The main report could only reproduce a selection of the materials collected during the survey period. This Appendix contains a fuller account of young people’s views expressed during the discussion groups. It does not include quotes from individual interviews. These are included in the main report.

Previous homelessness _____

In group discussions it is difficult to ascertain the progress of some young homeless people as they move through services. It was established that some had never been homeless before, but that others had had several bouts of homelessness. Here are some examples of their experiences:

“(I) was in London, was stabbed, threatened with CS gas; ...mum wanted me out; ...travelled to Scotland; ...went to hostel, ...wouldn’t stay there... went to (young person’s) hostel.”

“The social makes folk steal, because I was 16, no income support, told I could get £35 a week maximum for rent.”

Some had mainstream accommodation before but had become homeless again.

“The outreach worker got me a house through the council, but it was awful. It was damp. I complained and they said they couldn’t do anything about it. I had to stay there a month – the notice period – and then come back here.”

“I had a house for 3 months, but I went to pieces and had to come back.”

One had been kicked out of home when he was 14 because of a drug habit. Another had experienced homelessness in other parts of the UK. **“The other hostels (here) are crap. The one here is crap. I’ve been in eight of these hostels – and the ones in (other parts of the UK) are better than the one here. You get treated better (elsewhere).”**

Another had been in a mixed age traditional hostel **“I was there fir 2 hours. It’s the real pits for auld yins wi drinkin’ problems.”**

Views of services _____

Local authority services

Views of housing services:

The majority had been in contact with the council at some point. Here are their impressions.

“I went to the housing. I told them I was homeless. They gave me a form and that was it. I got no advice, no nothing.”

“I had a house but it was damp. I complained and they told me I was lucky I had a house.”

“The council are crap. I was going to them for ages and they’ve not offered me nothing.”

“A lot of us can’t get a house because of our record. I can’t go back to my house because there is a bail condition stopping me.”

“The freckles (police) referred me to the council. I spent three and a half months sleeping rough on the streets, was on the list for years. I’ve used homelessness before.”

“The council base everything on money, if you are in arrears you get nothing.”

“All they do is give you leaflets.”

“they don’t let on, don’t tell you, it is as if they are hiding something”

(of a reception centre) **“They treat you like an adult, the way it should be”**; **“you got support when you asked for it”**; **“For a guy like me who doesn’t use drugs and is surrounded by those that do it’s no use.”**

“I always get hassled there.”

“I would like to stay there for the rest of my life.” (Of a reception centre)

“Told I couldn’t get a house because I had no child of my own.”

“You need some disability to get a house.”

“If you’re with the mental health service – you’re higher on the list.”

“Spent 3 years on the list. Never saw a homeless person’s officer.”

Staff were **“OK”** **“You’re just a number really.”**

“Intimidating, their whole attitude, some of the questions too personal.”

“Very difficult, they are not trying to help you. They never tell you what is available.” **“My mother lived in –shire and they tried to refer me back there but I was at school here.”**

One person complaining about lack of facilities in his B&B was told **“they had met their obligations.”** Another roofless person was told **“that’s Glasgow’s problem.”** Lack of awareness and proper information was raised **“they don’t let on, don’t tell you, it is as if they are hiding something.”**

“You need to know the right questions to ask.”

“They never tell you what is available.”

“They treat you like dirt.”

“They are cheeky to you.”

“They don’t care.”

“They seem to think that if you manage to keep yourself clean and tidy you can’t be homeless.”

“I got much more help when I was 16. When you are older you don’t get so much help” (he is now 20).

There were mixed views of social work services:

“I’m not for authority, it is too directive.”

“I’m never comfortable with social work they are always trying to figure you out.”

“Social work acting like a big sister.”

“Social workers are bollocks. They tell you they care and they do nothing for you.”

“Social workers sit and talk all day and do nothin.”

“When you’re in care they should give you a good start, but they don’t they treat you like a number.”

“Once yer 18 – they don’t want to know any more.”

“Social work tell you what to do with weans – a 23 yr old social worker with nae weans telling my mum what to do.”

“Pretty good.”

“The social work department like to know too much, there is no confidentiality.”

“No use for emotional help, they try a bit too much, hurt a person rather than help them. They are all right for practical help.”

“Support workers fight for you, even at 8 at night there is somebody to turn to”

Views of education services:

“School is OK it has kept me going.”

A teacher **“knew a bit what to expect and what questions to ask.”**

There is **“nothing in schools about housing or budgeting.”**

Some wanted the chance to resume their education.

“I would go back to school if given a chance.”

“I would be interested in going to back to try and get qualification at college – but nobody helps you wi that.”

Voluntary sector young person’s supported accommodation

Most people liked voluntary sector young person’s supported accommodation, though views were expressed on the rules.

“There’s rules to follow.”

“Don’t like the rules, they treat you like a child; meals are at allocated times, your social life is banned.”

“helped a lot, got a key worker who set tasks, it helped.”

“I didn’t go because of the money, I had a job.”

“(they) never let me down.”

“helps you to socialise and meet new people; staying here helps you to move on to decent accommodation.”

“In the end of the day it is a roof over your head.”

Support services **“really helped to get you accommodation.”**

But **“I’m left with £29.40 a fortnight.”**

“It’s an address, roof over your head, budgeting on £14, time to sort yourself out.”

Young people’s views about support workers:

“Support workers fight for you, even at 8 at night there is somebody to turn to.”

“It’s good to have someone who is not going to judge you.”

“The staff are good although some have their off days.”

“They help you out financially and give advice about things like credit unions.”

“They take you out for dinner.”

“They are always there for you.”

“I don’t think I get enough help. Your keyworker doesn’t come to you. You should see them once or twice a week.”

“I wouldn’t want to see them as often as that.”

“You can talk to any other workers here, but its only private if you are speaking to your keyworker.”

Voluntary sector mixed-age supported accommodation

Most young people would prefer to live with other young people.

“The old yins shouldn’t be in here wi us. They should be in an old folk’s home, or Carstairs or in care. But no here.”

"You get help with budgeting, managing money, often quite a lot of emotional support"

"The older folk complain about us and we complain about them."

The quality of the accommodation was generally valued:

"You've got a TV and a fridge in your room. It's better than the jail. It's the best hostel in town."

"Ye get yer privacy here. You don't have to sleep in a dorm wi old dossers".

"Its clean."

"There's loads of hot water."

"This is a hostel, everyone in here thinks for themselves."

There were mixed reactions to some of the rules:

"The rules are fair enough generally."

"The rules are just common sense – and they can be flexible. you get 2 overnight passes and 2 late passes. And if you come back drunk they take your cigarettes and matches off you. If you cause any hassle they put you out for a couple of hours."

"It's too strict. You're not allowed any visitors. My mum came to see me on my birthday. I hadn't seen her for ages. I couldn't even let her in the door. It's no even that she cannae come to my room – she's no allowed in the building – the big room nor nothin."

"Got tae stand outside wi visitors – even if its raining."

"No' allowed any visitors."

"Not allowed to sleep during the day – have to be up for the daily meetings."

"Lack of privacy."

"Thrown out of building on Sunday afternoons."

"Limitation on visitors."

"Things go missing."

"Food rotten."

"Other residents can cause problems."

Views of support staff:

"He's brilliant!"

"She could get a job in a prison."

"Would like a say in how the staff do their job" but "staff have their rights too."

"Some of the staff are a bit above themselves."

"They look down on you."

"They take it out on us if they've got problems at home."

"They could change the visitors' policy tae let family in."

"You get help with budgeting, managing money, often quite a lot of emotional support."

"Learned zero in three years."

"Staff knock on your door a lot."

"Staff walk about at night a lot."

"Pestered by staff 24 hrs a day."

"Some staff are arseholes."

"A lot of staff are very good, some are fucking shite."

"They range from brilliant to very bad."

"You get hassles."

“Great, brilliant, if it was not for her (landlady) I would not be able to manage”

Supported lodgings _____

With one exception, everyone seemed to like living in supported lodgings. The best things were identified as

“food, independence, freedom, more money.”

“You can do what you want.”

“You have a lot more money than in (supported accommodation).”

“Everything is done for you – no cooking, chores etc.”

“Great, brilliant, if it was not for her (landlady) I would not be able to manage.”

B&B and traditional hostels _____

These services were not liked or found to be suitable.

Of B&B: **“It was a nightmare.”**

“Bloody crap, terrible furniture, food terrible, lots of rules.”

Of traditional hostels: **“Pure squalor.”**

“Need to update their services to be like xxx Centre.”

“Full of junkies, wouldn’t go there.”

“Pure minging.”

Benefits agency _____

Overall negative views were expressed, though a few had had a positive experience.

“I applied for a crisis loan and got it.”

“Generally OK.”

“It should be petrol bombed. They should be in here and see how they like it.”

“Their attitude is all wrong. They don’t want to help you.”

“If you apply for a crisis loan you know yer no goin tae get it before you start.”

“They mess you about.”

“See speaking to them behind the glass screen, its like talking to a brick wall, man.”

“The social makes folk steal, because I was 16, no income support, told I could get £35 a week maximum for rent.”

“A waste of time.”

“Don’t get money till you get a job.”

“I was refused furniture under the 26 week rule – not a planned resettlement.”

“No bed, refused.”

“They treat you like shit”.

“They don’t care.”

“They don’t care if you are homeless.”

“The social do nothing for you.”

“Bollocks.”

“You should be told what you’re due.”

Careers Service and the Job Centre _____

“They send you to employment opportunities but really you don’t have a hope of getting them.”

“It helps you get a job and gives you information.”

"They never turn you away, they stick up for you"

"The job centre is shite an all. They should be sacked. People yer own age telling you what tae do – shite."

"They don't help. Staff always blame somebody else if you have a problem."

Outreach and streetwork services _____

"The outreach workers are good. They help you out in an application for housing, help with furniture and they still come and see you when you get a house. They got me a bed and a Baby Belling and they were coming up to see me twice a week because they knew I was depressed. And then they helped me get back in here."

Health _____

Of GPs: "Brilliant."

"Depends who you get."

"You get a good service."

Some could not be seen by the local doctor because they were temporary residents.

"The psychiatrist is good, made me realise I take drink and drugs to forget things."

"These people (addiction services) haven't got a clue abut taking drugs."

Drop in services _____

"Brilliant, keeps you off the streets."

"Helps you with letters, phone calls."

"Good if you need information."

"They have everything here, this is brilliant, they help you with choices."

"Brilliant."

"You give them respect and they shall respect you back."

"(It's) somebody to speak to."

"They never turn you away, they stick up for you."

"They still keep in contact even if you are banned."

"Rubbish, they're there for students."

Participation and involvement _____

Across the survey areas practice varied on whether young people were consulted about their accommodation or support services, and what form the consultation took.

Few had ever been formally asked their views on the support services they received.

"They called a meeting recently. That's cause they had somethin to say." "They used to have more resident's meetings but there's new management now."

"The managing director doesn't even have the guts to tell us when he's changin things – he gets the staff to do it."

"We don't get a say – we have to stick to the rules or you're oot."

"We used to get pay for view TV for the fitba – but now he's stopped that. He wouldnae even buy us new chalk for the pool table."

"We used to hiv bingo every month – an he's stopped that an all."

"Not having the residents cooking."

"I'm just here for a house".

“You need help with money, a roof, and rehabilitation for folk who have been sleeping rough, and help getting a job”.

Few people had made a formal complaint.

“The council never said you could complain.”

“I don’t want to make a complaint, half the time its OK.”

“I don’t think the Council would listen.”

“No – you go to yer keyworker.”

“If you want to complain – you go to (the worker) – but she cannae do nothin.”

Consultation at local and national level _____

Few had ever been consulted about their views of services:

“Nobody asks our views about nothin.”

“I don’t know if I would like to be asked, it has never happened.”

All felt they would like to have a say, and a variety of methods were suggested:

“I would like to see them in person.”

“I would like to go to the Scottish Parliament and tell them what it is like and for them to try being homeless.”

“It would be good to get young people across Scotland aged 16 to 21 together.”

“I wouldn’t mind going to meetings if I knew it would make a difference.”

How young people felt perceived by others _____

“They think we are all junkies.”

“It’s impossible to get a job when yer in here. Nobody would gie you a job.”

“Ye cannae get a job when yer address is here.”

“They think you’re bad, bammy, a druggie, they always think the worst.”

“People see us as scum – dirt.”

“You are stereotyped if you are homeless.”

“You get the same service whether you are homeless or not.”

Views on what would help other young people _____

“They should get people who are qualified in homelessness.”

“There should be a (specific supported accommodation project for young people) in every town.”

“Go into schools to tell them what it is going to be like if you’re homeless.”

“Don’t get kicked out.”

There should be **“meetings in schools and youth clubs.”**

“The way you’re treated as homeless makes a difference.”

“A young people’s service that’s open all the time with people who’ve been in your shoes to talk to, who are now working.”

“(You) have to be optimistic, got to get your priorities sorted out.”

“Overall there should be more facilities for young people of 15-20 such as youth clubs.”

Advice on budgeting on very little money: **“The main problem is money, trying to balance things.”**



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