

FACT SHEET: Youth Homelessness

Every year, thousands of young people leave home before they reach 18. While some are able to find suitable housing, many others become homeless. With the absence of a stable living environment, young people often find it difficult to continue in education or find employment, making them particularly vulnerable. At the YMCA, we believe that extra help and support concerning access to services, supporting families and providing suitable accommodation could avert the breakdown of families and prevent young people from leaving home.

Youth Homelessness: The Facts

- The breakdown of family relationships has been identified as the main cause of homelessness, often following years of family conflict and some violent and abusive situations. In a survey of 50 families affected by youth homelessness, 72% of parents believe that extra help could prevent family breakdown.
- Social and economic disadvantage are also factors and young people who become homeless are often from marginalised backgrounds. Research shows that among those most likely to become homeless are young people who have had a troubled childhood, including parents with mental health problems, family upheaval and violence and abuse within the home. Self harming, involving drugs, alcohol, crime and violence are also behaviours linked with homelessness. Homelessness impacts upon the mental health and well being of young people. A significant minority of young homeless people have complex needs.
- Data on youth homelessness is limited and is based only on the numbers of young people who have sought help from agencies and service providers. There are many more hidden homeless who rely on extended family or friends to provide them with a floor, a sofa or a bed to sleep on.
- Young people aged between 16 and 25 made up 39% of the total homeless population during 2005/6, based on government figures for England. Of the 36,770 young people who were deemed to be statutorily homeless, 7,440 were aged 16 to 17 and 900 were aged 18 to 20 and had previously been in local authority care. Both these groups have priority needs under housing legislation.
- To be classified as statutorily homeless, a young person has to apply to their local authority. A decision then depends on an assessment of their particular circumstances. If accepted as being statutorily homeless, the local authority is required to provide accommodation if it also judges them to be in priority need.
- A UK-wide review of youth homelessness published in 2008 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation showed that in England and Wales the number of young homeless has fallen over the previous three years but remained constant in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Despite a fall in numbers in some parts of the UK, the same survey indicates that in the whole of the UK around 75,000 young people continue to be at risk and are in contact with homelessness services every year. This includes at least 31,000 additional young people not recognised as being statutorily homeless.



- The number of young people sleeping rough on any one particular night is comparatively low but the aggregate number experiencing rough sleeping in any one year is much higher. This suggests that when homelessness begins a young person may experience a period of rough sleeping before finding temporary housing.
- In November 2006, Ruth Kelly, then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, CLG, announced a package of measures to further prevent and tackle youth homelessness and a commitment that by 2010, no 16- or 17-year-olds should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation by a local authority under the homelessness legislation, except in an emergency.
- The National Youth Homelessness Scheme was launched by CLG in 2007, since when the number of 16- and 17-year-olds accepted as homeless and subsequently placed in bed & breakfast accommodation in England has fallen.
- In 2006, with support from CLG, the YMCA launched the Step-In project to prevent teenage homelessness and provide safe accommodation for young people in crisis situations. Step-In projects include supported lodging schemes, school education projects, family support and mediation, easy-access housing advice, and work with the private rented sector. In their first year, Step-In projects helped 1,396 teenagers: 1,174 with early advice and education, 85 with family support and mediation and 137 with a safe place to live and support for the future.

The YMCA Sleep Easy

Every night YMCAs provide rooms and support for 7000 young people who would otherwise have nowhere else to sleep. To mark Poverty and Homelessness Action Week some YMCAs in England will be staging sleep out events. If you would like to join a YMCA Sleep Easy please click on the event map on the PHAW website for contact details for your nearest event.

References

This fact sheet draws information from two reports; Youth Homelessness in the UK, published in May 2008 by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York and Centrepoin; Breaking it Down – Developing Whole-Family Approaches to Youth Homelessness, a study carried out by YMCA England and Croydon Housing Association for Young Single Homeless (CAYSH) which sought the views of 50 parents and carers of homeless teenagers. Where Government statistics are used these come from Communities and Local Government Policy Briefing 18, Tackling Youth Homelessness, published in March 2007 © Crown Copyright 2007.

