

Youth homelessness in the UK



In 2007 Centrepoint, the University of York and Joseph Rowntree Foundation conducted the first study into youth homelessness for ten years. The study looked at how youth homelessness has changed and what is being done to help prevent youth homelessness and support the young people affected.

Over 300 young people and professionals took part in the study across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Stats and facts

How many homeless young people are there in the UK?

In a year, 75,000 young people had to seek help from services because they were homeless. That means 1 in 100 young people in the UK experienced homelessness.

What are the effects of homelessness?

Homeless young people have poorer mental and physical health than other young people. They are more likely to have alcohol and drug problems. Many homeless young people are not in education, employment or training because they are homeless.

1 in 100

Young people experience homelessness

Who is homeless?

According to the Government:

- 19% of young people accepted as homeless by local authorities are aged 16–18
- 31% are aged 19 or 20
- 50% are 21 to 25

Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be homeless – especially in London.

Why are young people becoming homeless?

The main cause of homelessness in the UK is family breakdown, usually between young people and their parents or step-parents.

Many homeless young people have experienced long-term conflict in the home, often involving violence.

Homeless young people may also have:

- Come from less well-off backgrounds
- Been in care
- Run away from home
- Been involved in crime or anti-social behaviour
- Been excluded from school
- Been affected by issues in their communities (such as serious group offending or conflict)

Where do homeless young people go before they get help?

Some young people have to sleep rough for short periods of time before they are able to find help – usually in places such as on night-buses, bus depots or bin rooms. Young people may also stay with friends (sofa-surf) or in squats.

Where are young people homeless?

Young people are homeless all over the UK. The highest proportion of young people reported as homeless is in Scotland, followed by Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

What is being done to help homeless young people?

Changes to policy

Major policy changes have taken place across the UK. This has included new ways to tackle youth homelessness and better ways to help homeless young people. There is now more concern about homeless young people and what happens to them.

Prevention

There has been an increase in the number of services that help prevent homelessness before it happens, such as family mediation and homelessness education in schools. However, there is still a need for more help – especially support for parents of young people.

Education, Employment and Training Support

Young people are getting more support to help them get back into education, employment and training when they are homeless. However, claiming benefits can make it difficult for young people to get back into work or rent their own flat.

Improved mental health and drug treatment services

More young people are now getting help if they have mental health problems or are using alcohol and drugs. However, more services need to be available (e.g. for people with depression, or problems with cannabis or alcohol), and they need to be easier to access.

16 and 17 year olds

More young people are now being accepted as homeless due to changes in the law which mean that 16 and 17 year olds can now be recognised as homeless and receive help.

Floating support

Floating support is now available across the UK and is very effective at helping young people keep their tenancies once they get their own place, pay their bills on time and rebuild relationships with friends and family.

Temporary Accommodation

A range of temporary accommodation has been developed to help young people in emergencies. However there is not always enough and it is not always available in the right places.

Rent deposit guarantee schemes

In many areas more young people are being given help to pay the deposits on their flats, especially in the private sector. But the schemes are not available to all young people and are often only for those moving into permanent accommodation. More needs to be done to educate landlords so they are willing to rent to young people who are homeless.

What next?

Young people believe that more should still be done to help young people who are facing homelessness:

- To recognise the young people who are at risk of homelessness and support them and their families so leaving home is not the only option
- To understand why young people become homeless and not try to make them stay living at home if it is not safe for them to do so
- To educate young people about where to go for help and what help they should be given in an emergency
- By providing more 'one-stop-shops' that young people can access for advice where all their needs can be assessed under one roof
- By training more housing officers to understand young people's needs and support them for as long as they need
- By making accommodation more affordable so young people are able to find somewhere to live that they can afford if they are on low incomes or benefits

For more information see the full report at www.jrf.org.uk

"The support I've had will be really beneficial in the long term because I've had loads of help with budgeting my money, paying rent. I'll take that all through my life because I'll be doing it all my life."
Young person, Edinburgh

