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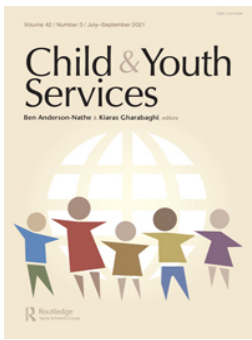
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Youth Homelessness in Austerity Britain: "We Can't Help You, You Need to Go Back Home"

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ABSTRACT

The growth of homelessness in the UK has been attributed to government led economic reform, beginning with the election of David Cameron in 2010, who promised to significantly reduce the UK's welfare bill. We argue that these welfare reforms have adversely affected vulnerable young people and placed key services beyond their reach. This paper shares data collected from young people aged 16–21 living in a homeless hostel in England and seeks to challenge notions of responsibilization, which hold young people accountable for the circumstances in which they become encased. Participants reported that although homelessness was precipitated by violence and abuse at home, local authorities sought parental consent before making provision available. Young people described being refused help and advised to "go home" when they reported themselves as being homeless. Despite feeling safe and well supported in the hostel, residents were aware that hostel support was temporary and described feeling worried about their future. Our research highlights the limited nature of services and concludes that vulnerable young people, without family support, are especially disadvantaged by their circumstances.

Introduction

It is estimated that in the UK 1.3 million children have been forced to "sleep rough" or in an "unsafe place" in any one night (Clarke, 2016). Although these figures are alarming, they fail to capture the experiences of young people without a "home" and researchers note that statutory figures exclude those experiencing "hidden homelessness", including those staying informally with friends or relatives, instead of accessing homeless provision or receiving state support. Holtschneider (2016) reported that homeless young people in their research had experienced poor social care, including neglect, sexual abuse and emotional abuse. Leaving home can be experienced as an escape from abusive environments, and can provide young

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people with opportunities to distance themselves from harmful relation-
ships (Hyde, 2005). While some young people might qualify for social
housing, meeting criteria set by local authorities, such as fleeing to escape
violence or abuse, most are expected to find appropriate accommodation
from the private rental sector. Social housing levels are insufficient across
much of England and the UK and councils rely heavily on the private ren-
tal sector (Crisis, 2019). Private market rents are set at a level to extract the
maximum financial return and landlords are able to select renters with
large or stable incomes (Wilkinson & Ortega-AlcÁzar, 2017). The lack of
affordable housing options means that young people can be forced into
informal housing agreements which are reliant on the good will of friends
or family who permit the use of a spare room or sofa for a limited period
(Clarke, 2015). Evidence gathered by McCoy (2018) shows that the major-
ity of young people who access homelessness services have already experi-
enced periods of hidden homelessness, 60% had been living with close
friends, 23% had stayed with acquaintances and 11% had stayed with
strangers. Such arrangements can instill feelings of indebtedness and create
the conditions which leave young people vulnerable to exploitation
(Ellis, 2019).

Chances for young people to live independently, without external finan-
cial support, have been detrimentally impacted by lack of opportunities to
access secure well-paid employment. Increasingly, employment opportuni-
ties for those without qualifications tend to be insecure and poorly paid
(Bell & Blanchflower, 2013; Ellison, 2017). Changes in work contracts,
wages and house prices have each contributed to forming, what has been
termed, "generation rent", with young people more likely to rent than own
their own home than in previous generations (McKee et al., 2020). The
high demand in the private rental sector alongside the short, insecure
nature of many employment and housing contracts often means that young
people can find it necessary to return home to their families (Heath, 2018).
For some young people, family provide key supports to enable young peo-
ple to move out of the family home and often continue to provide financial
means as well as housing when things do not go as planned (Chiuri & Del
Boca, 2010; Hill et al., 2017). However, for those without a parental or fam-
ily safety net, housing conditions are precarious and further complicated by
the stringent conditions that are frequently attached to tenancies (Watts
et al., 2014).

There is significant evidence that welfare and social policy reforms in the
UK have led to an increase in homelessness amongst young people. In his
2012 speech, David Cameron rallied the notion of feckless youth with calls
to tackle the "intentionally homeless" population. Focusing particularly on
young people, he declared that young people should live with their parents

until possessing the financial means to move out: "Can't afford a home of your own? Tough, live with your parents" (Cameron, 2012). There is now consensus that young people have been disproportionately affected by the austerity measures introduced by the government since 2010 (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Homeless Link 2018a, 2019; Watts et al., 2015). Important research highlights significant cuts in budgets for children and youth services (Webb & Bywaters, 2018) and in 2015, the Equality and Human Rights Commission noted an age inequality gap in Britain. Young people have faced the most significant falls in income and employment when compared to older groups, have experienced more extensive reductions in welfare benefit entitlements and have experienced greater barriers to accessing appropriate housing and stable employment. Young people are also far more likely to have their benefits sanctioned than older benefits recipients (Watts et al., 2014). These sanctions can significantly reduce the amount a young person will receive through welfare benefits and often have detrimental impacts on their housing options (Homeless Link, 2019). The combination of these factors places young people at increased risk of insecure living arrangements and homelessness.

In recent years, there have been a series of significant reforms to Housing Benefit. The changes to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates and the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) have substantially impacted young people by changing who is eligible and the amount of assistance they receive (Crisis, 2019; Watts et al., 2015). In 2011, LHA was reduced from covering 50 percent of local rents to 30 percent. LHA support was further eroded in 2013 when the calculation of rates was shifted to the Consumer Price Index. This index is detached from local changing rental prices and as such is not a useful indicator to calculate adequate housing benefit support (Crisis, 2019). In 2014 and 2015 LHA rates increased by only one percent and were frozen completely from 2016-2020. Ultimately, the changes to LHA have led to rates being further detached from the reality of local private rents. In areas where private rents are rising, people increasingly experience a large gap between the financial support benefits they receive and their monthly rent (Crisis, 2019; Homeless Link, 2019; Watts et al., 2015).

In 2015, the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) was extended from under 25 s to under 35 s. The SAR is the maximum of housing benefit support those under the age of 35 (without dependents) are eligible for when privately renting a room in a shared house (Wilkinson & Ortega-AlcÁzar, 2017). The SAR amount is set under LHA guidelines. Crisis (2019) determined that under-investment in LHA rates means that in 2018/19 that 97% of areas in England were unaffordable for receiving housing benefit support. It is therefore unsurprising that there is

exceptionally limited availability of private rental sector housing below the SAR amount (Crisis, 2019; Homeless Link, 2018a; McCoy, 2018; Watts et al., 2015). Such a radical overhaul of housing benefits reflects a combination of discouraging young people to live on their own, attempting to ensure housing parity between those who claimed benefits and those who did not as well as bringing down overall government expenditure on housing benefits (Watts et al., 2015; Wilkinson & Ortega-AlcÁzar, 2017). The government voiced concern that young people receiving state benefits were financially "better off" than those living at home. Described in this way, young people were positioned as "undeserving" and accused of declaring themselves as "intentionally homeless" (Cameron, 2012), thereby claiming priority housing despite having stable families with whom they were welcome to reside. In fact, research shows quite the opposite and that most often, young people seeking help for homelessness have experienced trauma, abuse and tragedy (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Watts et al., 2018). Even so, the term "intentionally homeless" has been used to justify withholding social housing to young people claiming homelessness (Watts et al., 2014).

Young people have felt the cumulative effects of changes to LHA rates and SAR amounts. This has resulted in significant reductions in the levels of financial support that young people receive to help with the cost of their housing, and also contributed to an increase of unstable or unsafe housing situations for young people vulnerable to homelessness. Watts et al. (2015) point out that "strangers" and different age groups sharing living accommodation are more likely to have conflicts and insecure rental agreements as well as creating situations where young people will be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation.

Whilst politicians promised that welfare reform would prioritize help for those "who most need it", increased stipulations mean that claimants are held to strict conditions in order to access government support (Watts et al., 2014). As such, UK welfare currently treads a fine line between helping the most vulnerable whilst simultaneously shaming them for their need of such intervention. Hence rather than understanding those without a home as being victims of structural issues, emerging from poverty and social disadvantage, their vulnerability is perceived as an individual affliction to be managed and controlled accordingly (Brown, 2017). Welfare reforms have contributed to a significant rise in homelessness, with research claiming that homelessness has increased over 165% since the beginning of the welfare reform in 2010 (Homeless Link, 2018b).

The focus of this paper is to highlight experiences of young people aged 16-21 who have declared themselves as homeless and been subsequently placed in a specialist youth homeless hostel. Hostels act as a

supported living provision for young people who report as homeless. Although placements are limited and sometimes difficult to obtain, they provide a safe and supported environment for young people without a home. Little is known about the populations in hostel accommodation and even less is known about the everyday experiences of young people living in them. By sharing young people's everyday experiences, this paper explores youth homelessness in an age of austerity and highlights systematic boundaries that jeopardize the safety of vulnerable young people.

Methods

This paper is based on research with residents living in a charity run specialist Youth Homeless Hostel for 16–24 year olds, in a northern city in England. Ethical approval was granted from the University's Research Ethics Committee. Research was undertaken by the two authors of this paper in collaboration with the hostel who assisted with the recruitment of a steering group of six ex-residents, who were continuing to receive outreach support from the charity. The steering group helped determine the project focus and research methods most appropriate for understanding the experiences of young people accessing support after becoming homeless. Steering group participants were paid for their time and met with the researchers at regular intervals during the project to discuss findings, compile a policy brief, and to disseminate project findings to the charity and local service commissioners.

Following meetings with the steering group, all current hostel residents were invited to contribute to the research. Twenty residents expressed an interest in taking part and were given a project information sheet and asked to complete a consent form. After consenting to take part, residents were invited to share their experiences of day-to-day living in a number of ways, including, focus groups, timelines and questionnaires. Each participant was given a £30 shopping voucher to thank them for sharing their time. At the beginning of each session, participants were supported by the authors to trace key events that preceded their hostel placement onto a timeline. Though participants were encouraged to share as little or as much of their entry story as they wanted, many shared substantial detail and background information. Facilitating this exercise meant that the authors were aware and mindful of some critical points of residents' individual journeys and were able to steer focus group discussions sensitively. Focus groups were conducted with groups of five residents. At the beginning of each, it was requested that residents did not share information that they wanted to keep private from the other residents and asked

participants to be respectful of each other. The circumstances where confidentiality would not be able to maintained, namely if participants disclosed that they were being harmed or that they intended to harm someone else, were explained. Residents were reminded that they were free to withdraw at any time without sharing their reasons. Focus group discussions followed the following themes: everyday life, money issues, health, friends and family, support and housing. A professional transcriber transcribed discussions verbatim and names of participants and their associates were replaced with pseudonyms. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVIVO and further refined with input from the project steering group.

Findings

Twenty young people took part in the research, of which nine were male and eleven were female. Residents ranged in aged between 16 and 21 and were in a mix of education, employment, volunteering and unemployment. Thirteen young people survived solely on benefits, three supplemented their income with paid employment and four young people were under the age of eighteen and therefore were supported financially by social services. A quarter of residents reported that they had previously been in care. The reasons reported for entering the hostel were often centered around family conflict and family breakdown, with young people reporting that they had been threatened, abused, attacked or asked to leave.

Declaring as homeless

Housing is available only to those meeting necessary conditions, and as such, young people cannot register as being homeless if they are deemed to be "intentionally" so (Watts et al., 2014). Residents reported that they had experienced difficulties in declaring as being homeless. Participants were almost unanimously told to "go back home". For those fleeing violence and abuse at home, simply "going home" was not an option:

> Both of my parents are dysfunctional and to say the least, I got kicked out because mum didn't like me anymore. My dad was having problems with alcohol and my mum, mentally had issues, so it resulted them kicking me out. (Craig)

The majority of participants reported that they had become homeless as the result of family conflict; therefore, it was disconcerting for young people to discover that parental consent was required to access support. Timeline exercises with residents showed that most had experienced a turbulent upbringing and most had been the victim of abuse and neglect in the family home. For those with difficult family relationships, such consent

was almost impossible to gain, not least due to the welfare implications on family incomes, which were dependent on young people living in the family home:

> When you go to the council they try and get you back home. I was kicked out many times by my mum … all they do is ring my mum and [ask] 'have you kicked her out', she's like 'no, no, I never did' and blah blah blah – and then they're like 'we can't help you, you need to go back home' and I'd have nowhere to stay – I just had nowhere to turn. (Corrine)

Becoming homeless was experienced as a crisis, and while the majority were homeless as a result of family conflict, others were homeless due to issues relating to their mental or physical illness or disability. Hence homelessness occurred when young people were already at crisis point. Young people reported that by the time they presented themselves as homeless, they had exhausted all other options of accommodation and were desperately in need of help. Rather than being supportive, initial appointments to trigger aid were experienced as stressful and combative with many claiming that housing professionals intended to "catch them out" in an attempt to relieve pressure on oversubscribed services:

> They interrogate you. Saying 'are you lying to me?' It's right proper personal questions about your home and that. And they'll ask you the same questions over and over again. (Nancy)

When asked by housing professionals if they had somewhere safe that they could go, young people were asked to think of friends or relatives that they could stay with in the short term. Being turned away in times of crisis had a detrimental impact on young people's immediate wellbeing and placed them at increased risk of physical danger. Even so, informal homelessness was common and many reported that they had lived with friends or extended family members before sourcing secure and supportive shelter. Young people's voices often were not enough to garner support on their own and participants reported being turned away from housing services despite being without alternative accommodation options. For those under the age of eighteen, other professionals were sometimes required to advocate on their behalf:

> They turned me away as if I were no-one … I got a social worker and she actually did something about it. (Michelle)

Despite receiving a less than friendly welcome, young people were generous in their understanding of the views of housing officers and understood that they were the gatekeepers of valuable service provision:

> They come across forceful and they say 'go back to your mum's' … I think the reason why they do it is because they get a lot of calls and a lot of people declaring

themselves homeless when they're not really homeless, you get it, they're not really homeless, they had an argument with their mum. (Billy)

Participants described the process of declaring themselves as homeless. Most claimed that the interview techniques used by housing professionals were ineffective in encouraging them to share their reasons for being homeless. Furthermore, the local authority housing office was described as being "scary" and was not perceived as an appropriate place to disclose personal, and often painful, experiences. In addition, young people sometimes misunderstood what was being asked of them and did not always correlate their experiences of violence with professional language of "domestic violence" and "abuse". Being refused accommodation in such situations exposed young people to instances of further abuse and trapped them in the circumstances that they were seeking to escape.

> My mum […] kicked me out, so I went to my sister's and I was really upset and I took all my stuff […] but then the next day she's just, like, 'oh you're going back home, I'm taking all your stuff back' and she literally forced me to put my coat on and even forced me to put my shoes on and, like, leave. (Nancy)

Hostel placements and accepting support

Despite experiencing difficulties in accessing support, residents unanimously felt that they had benefited from their hostel placement and from the guidance given to them by the hostel's support workers. When asked about advice they would offer to other young people in their situation, residents almost unanimously suggested that others at risk of homelessness should seek support and to "always talk to someone and always take the help you get because you will need it" (Penny). Hostel placements were typically granted after months of informal homelessness and residents expressed relief at having finally found "somewhere safe" that they could stay. The hostel felt like a fresh start and gave young people space and support to focus on their future without the fear of violence or rough sleeping:

> Since coming here, I've had the chance to concentrate on myself for once and on my education and I got a job … I just feel like things are actually moving forward for me … I'll be getting my own flat soon hopefully and moving on. (Nancy)

The majority perceived the hostel as a safe space as Susanne explains: *"this is my safe place, it is, definitely"*. Similarly, Billy confirms his relief at finally being admitted to the hostel: *"coming here took a lot off my shoulders"*. In addition to receiving physical support in the way of shelter and somewhere to sleep, residents were particularly positive about the emotional and practical support that they received from hostel workers:

> Loads of random stuff, like … they showed you about different light bulbs. Just random stuff like that in case you're in your own flat, knowing what light bulb you want and how to change it as well. (Annabelle)

Rather than living the lavish lifestyles that politicians associate with "the culture of entitlement" (Cameron, 2012), even when claiming the maximum amount of benefits, residents struggled to cover basic expenses and described going without food to make ends meet. Subsequently, most residents reported that they lived in debt "nearly always" after borrowing informally from friends and family. As Penny illustrates: "Sometimes I'll lend off one person to pay back the other" (Penny)

To make up for the financial shortfalls, most sought employment as a way to gain extra income. For those attempting to stay in full time education, maintaining employment created additional pressures. Zero hours contracts are known to disproportionately affect those under the age of 25 (Ellison, 2017) and especially those who are unqualified (Bell & Blanchflower, 2013). All of the hostel residents who had managed to find employment were contracted under a zero hours agreement. Working under such conditions meant that residents were unable to plan their finances or budget to live within their means. Furthermore, being offered fewer hours one week made it tempting to work more hours the following week to make up for financial short falls. Since all residents were in receipt of housing benefit, they were bound by conditions that means they were not permitted to work more than 16 hours per week. However, being employed on a zero hours contract meant that employers could threaten to withhold future work from those who refused to work when asked. Subsequently residents were often persuaded to work over 16 hours, which in turn jeopardized their benefit provision. Juggling benefit stipulations with zero hours contract arrangements was described as "stressful" and acted as a demotivating factor against finding employment:

> Doing overtime wasn't good because at the hostel they were saying 'well if you do overtime that means you're getting paid more which means you lose some benefits' … I was doing more hours for nothing because I'd have to pay that back and it's just you're kind of stuck. (Nancy)

Benefit rules and regulations were viewed as incomprehensible and residents claimed that they relied on hostel staff to explain their entitlement. Residents appreciated the personal support and time that workers invested in them and keyworkers proved invaluable to helping young people to learn to navigate the complex pathways through the benefits system and to access services that were designed to support them:

> My life was in a massive, massive tangle … I didn't know what to do and since Paul has been my support worker I feel like … all the doors have been opened to the

right routes and it's left a lot of stress off my shoulders … he knows how to use big words … they fob me about. (Alison)

The scramble for independence

Although most participants found the support that they received in the hostel helpful, others were reluctant to receive additional support offered, instead maintaining that they needed to be self-sufficient. This is a familiar rhetoric for young people living in adversity, particularly when fleeing from violence or abuse (Coy, 2008; Ellis, 2018; Melrose, 2010). Despite this, residents reported that they entered the hostel without the knowledge required to live independently and therefore relied on hostel staff for information around cooking, cleaning, budgeting and nutrition. Although most described wanting to live alone, a number were worried about their ability to cope away from the supported environment that the hostel provided:

> I can't be ringing Tony upstairs and saying 'can you ring up my water company for me please and set up my water bill?' because you can't do that. (Jayne)

Housing benefits do not generally supply sufficient money for young people to live alone (Wilkinson & Ortega-AlcÁzar, 2017), and hostel residents were encouraged to share spaces and facilities such as laundry rooms and kitchens. Rather than referring to fellow residents as "family" as noted in other research (Holtschneider, 2016), our participants were unanimous in their view that they should maintain distance from those living alongside them. This view was encouraged by staff, who recommended that young people "keep themselves to themselves". Rather than being taught to help and encourage one another, residents were encouraged to keep their own counsel and to seek out professionals for support. As Nancy explains:

> You'll move on quicker if you keep yourself to yourself and instead of looking at other people, just look at yourself and don't look back. I'm only here temporarily, I'm not here to make friends, I'm just here for now to have somewhere to stay and to move out and get my own place. (Nancy)

Since most participants described leaving home after violence or abuse, it was not surprising that a significant number reported that they experienced high levels of stress and anxiety. Residents were open in talking about their mental health and each group raised mental health as a key concern. Participants overwhelmingly reported being unable to access mental health support, despite being known to mental health services such as CAHMS, and entering the hostel as a result of challenging circumstances. For those in receipt of mental health services, support was perceived as being inadequate to meet their needs. Many reported that they struggled to manage their mental health:

> I have got mental health issues. I do suffer from depression and anxiety. I do isolate myself on my bad days. I have missed or cancelled appointments because I've not been in that state of going out. (Eva)

Although residents struggled to access mental health support independently, hostel staff worked hard to facilitate access to mental health services. Even when hostel staff were able assist in setting up initial appointments, residents found subsequent support inadequate and insufficient to meet their needs in times of crisis. The types of provision available often did not fulfill young people's expectations about the types of support that were needed. Residents were frustrated by the length of time that was perceived necessary for treatments to impact their everyday feelings of wellbeing:

> It's just so difficult to get into, to the point where that person gives up trying to get help … 'you'll need to go and see this person and then this person' and 'then you'll need to have a trial medication', then 'you need to go and do a review and then wait' and then 'we're going to put you somewhere else and you're going to have to talk to them' … I could have topped myself by the time you've tried to help me. (Michelle)

Since support outside of the hostel was difficult to access, young people reported feeling anxious about their ability to cope when hostel support was no longer available. Surviving life after the hostel was felt to be challenging and young people articulated a disconnect from services that should have been available to help them manage independently. Ben shared his dismay: "I'm going to have to basically sort everything out myself."

Discussion

This study found that young people experienced difficulties in accessing services and were actively encouraged to seek short-term solutions for their housing needs. Despite homelessness being precipitated by family trauma and abuse, young people were denied support and instructed to "go home". These findings raise important concerns about understandings of vulnerability within policy (Brown, 2017) and question the efficacy of housing and welfare support policies for young people. While recent policy developments, such as "Staying Put" (DFE, 2013) have petitioned for children in care to be supported after turning 18 statistics show that around a quarter of homeless people have previously spent time in care (Cameron et al., 2018). The widening of policy regarding care leavers highlights the acknowledgement of policy makers that the age of majority is fixed somewhat arbitrarily at eighteen and thus ignores the context and circumstances of young peoples' everyday lives. Instead of attaching support to arbitrary age limits (Avery & Freundlich, 2009), we argue that support should be given in a way that takes account of the progression through the life course,

particularly when seeking to support those most vulnerable (Stein & Dumaret, 2011).

Residents unanimously reported that they were in crisis when they declared themselves homeless. Since crises were usually triggered by family dispute, it was incomprehensible to them that parental consent was required to trigger aid. Such rules discredit policies which claim "independence" for young people, whilst simultaneously undermining the validity of young people's declarations. Research by Ellis (2018) problematizes the twinning of vulnerability with age, and these findings further highlight that policies, with stringent age constructed boundaries, neglect the needs of the most vulnerable. Turning eighteen does not eradicate previous experience and to restrict services based on arbitrary markers of age provides a cliff edge for those most in need (Cameron et al., 2018). Limiting support in such a way homogenizes young people and minimizes lifestyle disadvantage that particular individuals may have experienced (Wilkinson & Ortega-AlcÁzar, 2017).

In the context of youth homelessness, we argue that turning eighteen should not exempt young people from help and should not restrict their access to a safe place to sleep. As shown by Watts et al. (2018), "sleeping rough is very rarely, if ever, a lifestyle choice in any real sense" (p. 239) and services should recognize that those presenting as homeless lack alternative options. As illustrated previously, residents described being treated with mistrust when accessing government-funded services. We call for an overhaul to the processes in place for young people reporting themselves as homeless. Though residents were in crisis when seeking help, they described being interrogated by housing officers and frontline practitioners. Services should therefore invest in suitable training for frontline personnel, encouraging an empathic approach to empower young people in crisis to seek appropriate health and support. Such changes would make important differences in ensuring that services were allocated effectively. We recognize the challenges faced by frontline practitioners, forced to stretch scarce resources available to meet the needs of vulnerable young people and therefore call for substantial investment for children and young people in crisis.

A significant number of our participants reported that they experienced difficulties in managing their mental health. Although a number accessed mental health services, they were frustrated with the perceived lack of support that they received. Despite presenting with long-standing mental health issues, residents sometimes lacked understanding about the treatments that were available to them. While some were offered prescriptions or counseling, the outcome of treatment often did not match their expectation or wishes for an immediate medicalized solution. There seems therefore to be an apparent disconnect between the expectations of those

seeking treatment and the treatments that are available. More work needs to be done to ensure that professionals working with high need young people are clear with their patients about the scope of treatments and therapies for those seeking them.

Conclusions

This research highlights significant gaps in provision for homeless young people. It responds to a "direct call from scholars in the area of youth homeless research" to include the voices of those most affected by homelessness (Holtschneider, 2016; Kidd, 2012). Including the voices of homeless young people revealed that often they are treated harshly and with mistrust when presenting as homeless. Despite such circumstances being precipitated by trauma, young people are expected to quickly share their circumstances in high stakes interviews with housing professionals order to qualify for even basic service intervention. Rather than being supported to share their experiences, young people reported being "interrogated" and dismissed if they were unable to back their claims with evidence from a parent or social worker. Those experiencing abuse or neglect at home struggled to understand the terminology that was discussed with them in a professional setting. It is therefore crucial that young people are adequately supported to share their experiences. Importantly, young people should never be returned to abusive situations.

Since young people are embedded within a society intent on the responsibilization of its vulnerable, it was unsurprising that participants described individualized notions of survival and saw other young people as potentially disruptive of their successful transition to independence. This view was encouraged by staff, who recommended that young people "keep themselves to themselves". Rather than being taught to help and encourage one another, residents were encouraged to keep their own counsel and to seek out professionals for support. Although effective in the short term, such strategies were not sustainable long term since professional support was time limited and keywork relationships were not intended to supersede placements. Hence important opportunities to guide and foster supportive networks between young people were lost. Residents were aware that support was time limited and understood that the networks of individuals helping them to cope on a day-to-day basis would be withdrawn. While other young people receive help, both financial and structural, from families (Heath, 2018), to remove services from those without such support serves to doubly victimize and reinforce their exclusion. Hence this paper argues that services need to feel inclusive and helpful to all. We hope that service providers and policy advisors will consider the commissioning of

extra support for young people most vulnerable to homelessness. We call for increased support for those young people requesting mental health services and a reconsideration of the age in which young people are required to move to adult only services. It is important that support is available to those who need it at the time when they most need it. Young people need to be given the benefit of the doubt when requesting aid and subsequently engaged in a holistic package of support that takes account of their experiences and works with them to plan a way in which they can manage independently.

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