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Housing
Executive

Experiences of
Youth
Homelessness

A report for the
Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Fiona Boyle, Fiona Boyle Associates

With Professor Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Policy,
The University of York

October 2021

Experiences of Youth Homelessness

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Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

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Acknowledgements

The willing participation of internal (NI Housing Executive) and external stakeholders (representatives from the five Health & Social Care Trust representatives and from wider provider organisations) in the interviews was greatly appreciated; providing viewpoints, feedback and commentary.

In addition, the support and guidance of members of the Project Advisory Group and Northern Ireland Housing Executive personnel is greatly appreciated; in particular research support from Charlotte Bradley (Assistant Research Officer) and Patrick Finucane (Research Officer) throughout the research project, and assistance from Richard Tanswell (Homelessness Policy and Strategy). Thanks are also due to the NI Youth Forum including Amanda Stewart (Project Leader) and two Young person's Peer Support Apprentices – Blair Anderson and Saoirse McEvoy. We also want to reference the resources produced by the NI Youth Forum on lived experience of homelessness.

The content of this report does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Housing Executive. Responsibility for the information and views expressed lies with the authors.

SECTION 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND – RESEARCH BACKGROUND, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

1.1 The NI Housing Executive (henceforth ‘the Housing Executive’) identified the need for Northern Ireland wide research on the theme of *Experiences of Youth Homelessness*.

Research rationale and aims

1.2 The purpose of the research was to provide an improved understanding of the issues that lead to young people becoming homeless, the support available to them and areas that need to be improved. In particular the research was focussed on assisting the Housing Executive in seeking to prevent homelessness amongst young people and to identify opportunities and/or links across government agencies, where improvements could be made to assist in the prevention of homelessness. The term ‘homelessness’ is defined at paragraphs 2.2 – 2.5, with particular reference to young people and the relevant legislation.

1.3 The research was externally commissioned by the Housing Executive and undertaken by lead consultant, Fiona Boyle¹ with support from the Housing Executive via the Research Unit and the Homelessness Strategy & Policy Unit. In addition, specialist knowledge and expertise on homelessness policy and literature relating to youth homelessness in the rest of the United Kingdom has been provided by Professor Nicholas Pleace, Housing Centre, The University of York.

1.4 A Project Advisory Group (henceforth referred to as the PAG) was established for the research study. Membership of the PAG comprised:

- Richard Tanswell Housing Executive, Homelessness Strategy & Policy (Client)
- Patrick Finucane Housing Executive, Research Unit
- Charlotte Bradley Housing Executive, Research Unit (Project Leader)
- Adele Faulkner Housing Executive, Supporting People
- Eileen Thompson Housing Executive, Homelessness Projects
- Sheila Smyth Health & Social Care Board
- Duncan Lyon Action for Children
- Karen McAlister Simon Community NI
- Eileen Best First Housing Aid & Support Services (FHASS)
- Ciara Scollay MACS

1.5 The agreed role of the PAG was to:

- Provide guidance to the research consultant in terms of methodology, data sources and key/emerging issues;
- Facilitate access for the research consultant to various data sets and consultation/feedback with relevant stakeholder groups including staff and service users;

¹ Principal consultant, Fiona Boyle Associates.

- Act as a sounding board to review key outputs including preliminary findings, test scenarios and the final report.

Research objectives

1.6 The key research objectives outlined in the research specification were as follows:

1. Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16-25 in Northern Ireland;
2. Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people;
3. Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing 'move on' options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready;
4. Exploration of relevant strategies employed across neighbouring jurisdictions to inform future service delivery in Northern Ireland;
5. Identification and exploration of the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions.

1.7 Within the overall remit of the main objectives, the specification outlined the following key questions and tasks.

Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16-25 in Northern Ireland

Analyse the scope of the problem of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland, thinking about the associated issues, trends and causes. Are young people affected by specific drivers into homelessness, or facing specific problems finding pathways out of homelessness – what are these, and do they differ much from problems faced by other homeless groups?

Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people

Examine the strategies currently employed in Northern Ireland to tackle youth homelessness, to what extent are these solutions successful? Explore access to support services, paying attention to typical pathways through temporary accommodation.

Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness

Explore the challenges in delivering services to young people who are homeless. Are there currently gaps in services, or particular barriers affecting accessibility? Are there challenges associated with providing 'move on' options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready?

Exploration of relevant strategies employed across neighbouring jurisdictions to inform future service delivery in Northern Ireland

Identify and explore methods of service delivery in other jurisdictions which are effective in meeting the needs of young people who are homeless, and which could potentially help guide strategy developed for the Northern Ireland context in the future.

Identification and exploration of the challenges in inter-agency working;

Explore the existing challenges in terms interagency working in relation to the implementation of the 'Regional good practice guidance between the Housing Executive and the Health & Social Care Trusts (hereafter referred to as HSC Trusts) on meeting the accommodation and support needs of 16-21 year olds'² (hereafter referred to as Regional Good Practice Guidance). Identify how the Housing Executive and all relevant agencies can better implement interagency working to successfully deliver homelessness prevention strategies.

Research methodology

1.8 The agreed research methodology was multi-faceted with three specific research areas and stages. These were as follows:

- **Research Area 1: Review of research, literature and policy context**

This element of the research included a review of the policy, research and literature in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and internationally on the theme of youth homelessness. It was agreed that the literature review would be directly linked to the research objectives namely - a review of the trends, causes and nature of youth homelessness (Objective 1), a review of current homelessness prevention initiatives in Northern Ireland including support and temporary accommodation (Objective 2), an examination of the literature relating to challenges in delivering services to young people facing or who are homeless (Objective 3), an overview of relevant and effective strategies and models of good practice in working with young people who are homeless (Objective 4) and finally a review of the academic and grey literature in relation to inter-agency working in this field (Objective 5). This Research Area is reported on in Sections 2, 3 and 7. Section 3 of this report was written by Professor Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Policy, The University of York. This section explores the evidence on youth homelessness, looking at research from Great Britain, Europe and North America on themes including the causes of youth homelessness, pathways into youth homelessness, research on the prediction of youth homelessness, barriers to exiting youth homelessness and evidence on effective systems and services for youth homelessness prevention and for providing sustainable exits from homelessness for young people.

- **Research Area 2: Quantitative analysis of existing data**

This desk-based element of the research sought to review available existing data relating to youth homelessness. Data for a 5-year period (2015 – 2020) was obtained from a range of sources including the Housing Executive (Housing Management System and Supporting People data) together with data from a range of statutory and voluntary sector organisations e.g. HSC Trusts, organisations working with young homeless people and young care leavers. Analysis of secondary data provided by the Housing Executive and the Health & Social Care Board outlines the trends in relation to the numbers of young people presenting and accepted as homeless. This area is reported on in Section 4.

- **Research Area 3: Primary Data collection**

Primary research was undertaken to establish the views and opinions of stakeholders – this comprised sectoral engagement through semi-structured interviews with eight key stakeholders/organisations,

² 'Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of 16 – 21-year-olds, Regional Good practice guidance agreed by the NIHE and the HSC Trusts', December 2014 and issued April 2015.

five HSC Trust representatives, 13 Housing Executive staff members and feedback from 29 (target of 30) young people who had experienced homelessness. This latter group included current and past service users of temporary accommodation provision and those using external or other types of service, e.g. transitional accommodation for care leavers including supported accommodation and the GEMS scheme, young people's accommodation, generic temporary accommodation, non-standard accommodation and Floating support services³ etc. During the fieldwork and subsequent analysis and write-up of findings from the interviews with young people it was recognised that respondents had largely been extremely articulate and able to identify, provide and reflect on responses across all the research topics. The sample did not include a high proportion of young homeless people who were less able; and as such it is recognised that the achieved sample may represent a bias towards more able young people amongst the homeless population.

Appendix 1 provides a list of all stakeholder interviews with external organisations (HSC Trust and community/voluntary sector) and Housing Executive respondents. The research tools including internal and external stakeholder interview schedule, and profile/interview questions for young people experiencing homelessness are available on request from the Research Unit, Housing Executive.

1.9 The primary research fieldwork took place between November 2020 and April 2021. The research methodology with service users was covered by guiding principles in terms of seeking access and obtaining views from individuals who could be deemed to be vulnerable because of their age and/or their situation. Firstly, in line with standard practice the research consultant was Access NI checked. Secondly, the research approach, methods and tools were developed in line with Social Policy Association Guidelines on Research Ethics⁴ and the general ethical principles for research with vulnerable groups⁵ in Northern Ireland. Thirdly, the consultant's track record in research with vulnerable homeless clients enabled the fieldwork stage – and the research briefing notes, invitation to interview/participation, research questionnaires and semi-structured interview schedules – to be adapted specifically for the needs and complexities of this group. For example, this included close attention to the wording of questions, in particular removing difficult language, jargon and also being cognisant of the fact that the research interview could potentially touch on current emotional issues and past or historical trauma. To respond to this service providers were made aware that the service user may require additional support.

1.10 For the interviews with service users particular consideration was given to informed consent, confidentiality, protection from harm and understanding of and agreement to the sharing of the research findings. Access to service users was organised via temporary accommodation and other service providers e.g. leaving and after care services.

³ Floating support: This is a generic name for any arrangement where support is delivered on a peripatetic basis to households in their own home or separately from the provision of housing. It is funded by the Supporting People programme and usually provided on a time-limited basis

⁴ www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/SPA_code_ethics_jan09.pdf

⁵ *Ethical Principles for Researching Vulnerable Groups (2003)* Paul Connolly, University of Ulster

1.11 The internal Housing Executive interviewees were spread across the three Housing Executive Regions⁶ and covered a range of staff levels and roles. The external interviewees for the HSC Trusts were drawn from the five Trust areas⁷. In addition, the wider external stakeholders were based across Northern Ireland and included organisations representing a wide range of client groups relevant to youth homelessness including homelessness per se, interconnections to mental health and addictions (drug or alcohol), 'looked after' children and young people and leaving care services.

⁶ Belfast, South and North Regions.

⁷ Belfast, Northern, Western, Southern, South Eastern Health & Social Care Trusts.

SECTION 2 YOUTH HOMELESSNESS CONTEXT – LEGISLATION, NI RESEARCH, POLICY CONTEXT AND CURRENT SERVICES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Introduction

2.1 Youth homelessness is a hard reality for many young people in Northern Ireland today. Homelessness is experienced in a number of ways and can include those with no accommodation they can reasonably occupy, those in temporary accommodation⁸, those sleeping temporarily at a friend's house (sofa surfing), those living in unfit dwellings, those sleeping rough and those threatened with homelessness.

Legislation

2.2 There is no separate stand-alone definition to cover youth homelessness per se; for the purposes of this study the following legislative definition of homelessness from the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 has been used⁹:

1. *A person is homeless if he has no accommodation available for his occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere.*
2. *A person shall be treated as having no accommodation if there is no accommodation while he, together with any other person who normally resides with him¹⁰ as a member of his family or in circumstances in which it is reasonable for that person to reside with him –*
 - (a) Is entitled to occupy by virtue of an interest in it or by virtue of an order of a court, or*
 - (b) Has an express or implied licence to occupy, or*
 - (c) Occupies as a residence by virtue of any enactment or rule of law giving him the right to remain in occupation or restricting the right of another person to recover possession.*

The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 placed a duty on the Housing Executive to secure accommodation for homeless people or those threatened with homelessness within a 28-day period and defined 'priority need' (see below). The Housing (NI) Order 2003 brought changes to the definition of homelessness and the provisions regarding becoming intentionally homeless and introduced an additional requirement for the Housing Executive to assess an applicant's eligibility for housing assistance. The Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 then introduced a statutory right to request a review of any decision as to a person's eligibility for assistance and suitability of offered accommodation. This Act also required the Housing Executive to formulate and publish a 'Homelessness Strategy' every five years. The two most recent homelessness strategies are mentioned at paragraphs 2.13 and 2.14.

⁸ Temporary Accommodation is accommodation that is not permanent, lasts only a short time and is transitional. The Housing Executive has a duty to provide temporary accommodation to households that have nowhere to live and that have passed the four homelessness tests and are waiting for an offer of settled accommodation, are being assessed under the homelessness duty who is homeless and has a priority need. Temporary accommodation must be suitable for the household's needs

⁹ This is the definition of homelessness, as per one of the four tests outlined in paragraph 2.3, which are used by the Housing Executive to assess whether an applicant is statutorily homeless.

¹⁰ All references to him and he in the quoted legislation, cover all individuals irrespective of gender.

2.3 As noted the Housing Executive has a statutory duty under the provisions of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, as amended, to investigate the circumstances of all applicants presenting as homeless. In carrying out its statutory duty to make enquiries into homelessness applications, the Housing Executive should consider whether the applicant meets the following four tests:

- Eligible for homelessness assistance¹¹
- Homeless/threatened with homelessness
- In priority need¹²
- Intentionality.

2.4 Where an applicant meets all the legislative criteria, the Housing Executive awards Full Duty Applicant status (FDA), and undertakes a housing need assessment, with the award of relevant points in line with the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme. Any household that meets the four tests outlined above is therefore accepted as a FDA; the housing duty to them includes ensuring that accommodation is made available for the household as well as the provision of temporary accommodation where necessary with the protection of the household's furniture and possessions.

2.5 Alongside the housing legislation the Children (NI) Order 1995 defines a 'looked after' child as one who is in the care of the HSC Trust or who is provided with accommodation by the Trust. Furthermore, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 provided guidance in terms of entitlement for homeless applicants who are in need and vulnerable. The relevant Articles are as follows:

Young People aged 16 – 17 years

Articles 18 of the Children (NI) Order 1995 gives Trusts a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and specifies criteria to assist Trusts to determine if a child is 'in need'¹³.

Article 21 (1) of the Children (NI) Order 1995 places a duty on Trusts to provide accommodation for any child in need within its area who appears to the authority to require accommodation as a result of:

- I. There being no person who has parental responsibility for him;*
- II. His being lost or having been abandoned; or*
- III. The person who has been caring for him being prevented from providing him with suitable accommodation or care.*

¹¹ To establish eligibility for homeless assistance the Housing Executive first investigates if the applicant, or any member of the applicant's household, has been involved in any unacceptable behaviour. The Housing Executive must also establish the applicant's eligibility for housing assistance under immigration/asylum regulations.

¹² The following homeless presenters are considered to have priority need: persons with dependents, pregnant women or persons with whom a pregnant woman resides, persons who are vulnerable for specified or other special reasons, persons made homeless as a result of an emergency, persons subject to violence or at risk of violence and young persons at risk of sexual or financial exploitation.

¹³ A child is in need if: (a) he or she is unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health or development without the provision of services by an authority; (b) his or her health or development is likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired without the provision of such services; or (c) he or she is disabled. Source: Children (NI) Order 1995, Guidance and Regulations.

Article 21 (3) of the Children (NI) Order 1995 places a duty on Trusts to provide accommodation for any child in need within its area who has reached the age of 16 and whose welfare the authority considers is likely to be seriously prejudiced if it does not provide him with accommodation.

Article 34C (8) of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 requires Trusts to safeguard and promote the welfare of relevant young people by providing and maintaining them in suitable accommodation where it is deemed necessary.

Young People aged 18 – 21 years

The Housing (NI) Order 1988 provides for applicants, including 18 – 21-year-olds who are homeless or who are threatened with homelessness to be assessed in line with the provision of the Order to determine what duty if any is owed to him by the Housing Executive.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 requires that Trusts provide vacation accommodation for qualifying and former relevant young people who are engaged in education.

Appendix 4 of the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002 places a duty on Trusts for certain groups of young people who are or have been looked after: eligible, relevant, qualifying and former relevant. If any of these young people become homeless they will be eligible for assistance under the Children (Leaving Care) Act (NI) 2002. To discharge this duty Trusts will, as necessary, liaise with the Housing Executive.

2.6 It is worth highlighting the primacy of the Children (NI) Order 1995 over the housing legislation for the HSC Trusts in exercising their duties to undertake an assessment and establish duties owed to a homeless young person aged 16/17 years old, under Article 21 of the Order. This was confirmed through two court judgments: firstly *R (G) v London Borough of Southwark 2009* in England¹⁴ and the judicial review case in Northern Ireland, *JR66 2012*¹⁵.

2.7 The Regional Good Practice Guidance was established in 2009 and reviewed in 2014. This guidance aims to detail how the HSC Trusts and the Housing Executive work together in a coordinated way to ensure that vulnerable young people aged 16 – 21 years old receive a joined-up service, ensuring that their housing and support needs are assessed and responded to appropriately. Further information from the legislation and guidance is provided at paragraph 2.16 in relation to the three groups of young people.

¹⁴ *R (G) v London Borough of Southwark 2009* – in this case, the challenge was around whether actual accommodation should be provided to the 17-year-old applicant by Southwark social Services, after he had been thrown out of his family home and was sofa surfing with friends. Southwark asserted that ‘help to acquire accommodation’ was sufficient under the legislation. The final ruling noted that children that meet the criteria under the law, must be accommodated by children’s services authorities, at least until their needs have been properly assessed and plans are in place to meet those needs. This followed on from a previous ruling. *R (M) v Hammersmith and Fulham LBC [2008] UKHL 14*. In that case the Lords had made it clear that when a child approached the housing authority for accommodation, they should be referred to children’s services for assessment under the Children Act.

¹⁵ *JR66, 2012* – in this case the claimant was a homeless 17-year-old boy who was referred to a HSC Trust in Northern Ireland by the Simon Community NI. The Trust decided that he was not a child in need, under the legislation, and so no accommodation duty was owed. The Children’s Law Centre assisted the claimant to bring a challenge via a Judicial Review, in which the HSC Trust conceded that it had erred in law. The Regional Good Practice Guidance originally established in 2009 was subsequently reviewed and updated (2014).

Research on youth homelessness in Northern Ireland

2.8 Discussion on the background to youth homelessness in Northern Ireland was included in a recent report for the Housing Executive on homelessness service user journeys¹⁶. It is worth including this in full as it highlights recent research and reports on youth homelessness including the two most recent homelessness strategies (see paragraphs 2.9 – 2.14)

2.9 Research in the 1990s and early 2000s noted a clear link between young people leaving the care system, wider family conflict and homelessness¹⁷. More recently this trend has been reconfirmed¹⁸. For example, the National Audit Office (2015)¹⁹ found that one third of care leavers became homeless within the first two years of leaving care, and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives. This clear link between the care system and homelessness is worth noting.

2.10 Furthermore, research in the field of youth homelessness²⁰ has highlighted a number of significant factors as follows:

- Young people who are homeless, and particularly those who have a background in the care system, often have a range of complex additional needs including mental health difficulties, a history of self-harm, and have experienced childhood abuse and low self-esteem;
- Young people are frequently unable to recognise or acknowledge their needs and may at times be unwilling to engage with services;
- Generic services to young people who are homeless are not adequately resourced to deal with the complexity of needs which some young people present with;
- There are significant challenges in seeking to refer young people to external agencies for more in-depth or specialist support.

The Council for the Homeless report concluded the following:

Given the complexity of needs of young people, it can be concluded that either their needs have not been adequately addressed whilst they are living in supported accommodation²¹ or that they are not being adequately prepared for, or supported during, periods of independent living.

2.11 This research and a study conducted by the University of York and Heriot-Watt University²² made suggestions around how best to support young people moving into independent living. Initiatives suggested in these studies included:

- Ensuring that young people were tenancy ready;
- The development of re-engagement plans to support the maintenance of tenancies;
- Access to crisis intervention services to support young people through specific difficulties;

¹⁶ *Homelessness Service User Journeys – A Report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive*, Fiona Boyle Associates, July 2021.

¹⁷ *Young Homeless People*, Fitzpatrick, S, 2000; *Trouble at Home: Family conflict, young people and homelessness*, Crisis, 2001. *Which youth became homeless in the UK? Changes and persistences in the biographical and social risks among 16 – 25-year-olds*, University of Cambridge, 2004.

¹⁸ *Young and Homeless*, Homeless Link, April 2018.

¹⁹ *Care Leavers' transitions to adulthood*, National Audit Office, 2015.

²⁰ *Telling It Like It Is: Research into the accommodation and support needs of homeless 16–21-year-olds in Northern Ireland*, Council for the Homeless NI, 2008, <http://chni.org.uk/YPTILILs.pdf> and NI Assembly, Research and Information Service Briefing Paper, Paper 42/16 – 16 June 2016, NAR 166-16, Eleanor Murphy.

²¹ Supported accommodation or housing is a generic name for various forms of long-, medium- or short-term accommodation that is provided with support as a condition of occupancy and as part of a combined package.

²² Quilgars, D. et al (2011) *Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions*. Centre for Housing Policy, University of York and School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University.

- Support to enable young people to build good local community connections, thus preventing isolation and loneliness;
- The development of ‘respite’ arrangements for young people for short periods of time, plus housing support pathways to allow young people to trial independence with an option to return to previous supported accommodation if necessary; and
- Schemes in the private rented sector with landlords or agents, to enable them to assist in supporting young people in their tenancies.

2.12 From a Northern Ireland perspective, the NIAO report²³ noted that young presenters include formerly ‘looked after’ children leaving the care system who are referred by the HSC Trusts. However, research²⁴ also suggests that there is a perception amongst some young single people (particularly males) that there is little point in applying to the Housing Executive for accommodation as they will be deemed to have no priority need, and given the length of the waiting list, an offer of social rented accommodation is unlikely.

Homelessness Strategies – Northern Ireland

2.13 The two most recent homelessness strategies in Northern Ireland made specific mention of young people in terms of higher levels of housing need and homelessness. For example, the **2012-2017 Homelessness Strategy** referenced the need for family mediation and family intervention programmes as a means of helping young people to sustain Housing Executive tenancies, and noted a number of proposals and services in response to youth homelessness. These came in part from work undertaken by the Promoting Social Inclusion Youth Homelessness subgroup (established 2008) and from 2010 onwards the work of the Strategic Regional Reference Group on *Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of Young People aged 16 and 17 who are Leaving Care or Homeless*. It was noted that considerable work has been undertaken to review existing joint working arrangements and to develop Good Practice guidelines and local protocols²⁵.

2.14 The **2017-2022 Homelessness Strategy** focussed on overall goals and objectives, rather than identifying specific homeless groups (other than chronic homeless). In terms of homeless young people, the Strategy had a clear focus on prioritising homelessness prevention. It references the need for pre-crisis intervention, based on a UK wide Government Report, *Making Every Contact Count*²⁶. A specific focus was looking at how services for all households (not just young people) can be managed in such a way that the individual does not reach crisis point, where homelessness might be the result or outcome.

²³ NIAO, *Homelessness in Northern Ireland, Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General*, November 2017.

²⁴ Pleace, N. & Bretherton, J. (2013) *Measuring Homelessness and Housing Exclusion in Northern Ireland*. Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

²⁵ *Meeting the Accommodation and Support needs of 16 – 21-year-olds – Regional Good Practice Guidance agreed by the NIHE and the HSC Trusts*, December 2014 – Revised Version.

²⁶ *Making Every Contact Count*, Department for Communities & Local Government, 2012.

Youth homelessness – specific ages and categories

2.15 As already noted the term ‘young homeless’ can cover a range of different age categories and circumstances; in addition, as noted legislation and policy outlines the statutory responsibility to young homeless people in different groupings. For the purposes of this research study the PAG focussed on three distinct and separate groupings of young homeless people, with particular reference to their potential pathways into homelessness, and particular responses to their homelessness on the basis of factors including their age and any previous/current interaction with the care system. These three groupings are as follows:

- Group 1** Young people who have been within the care system prior to the age of 16, and then become homeless at some later point;
- Group 2** Young people aged 16 or 17 years old, who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system, but who present as homeless;
- Group 3** Young people aged 18 – 25 years old, who present as homeless.

More detailed information is provided below in relation to these three groupings; and this terminology is used throughout this report. It is important to differentiate between these three groupings, albeit that some young people may move from one group to another, e.g. from Group 2 to Group 3, because their pathways into and out of youth homelessness are often quite distinct, not least because of different legislative duties and presenting needs and issues. In addition, it is important to emphasise that young people in Group 1 and those more generally moving into jointly commissioned services in a planned way, may not consider themselves to be homeless.

Group 1 – Young people who have been within the care system prior to the age of 16, and who may become homeless at some point in the leaving and after care journey (up until the age of 25). This includes young people who have been looked after on or after their 16th birthday and have been looked after for a period (not consecutive) of at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday (who then meet the criteria for leaving and aftercare support under the legislation). In this report, this group are referred to as ‘care experienced’, and it is recognised that they may have been in care from birth or a young age or may have entered care in their teenage years. In addition, these young people may have experienced different care settings including residential children’s homes, foster care and kinship care settings. Some young people in this group may experience homelessness between the ages of 16 and 17 (where remaining within their care setting has become untenable), albeit that the HSC Trust still has a statutory duty towards them, or at any point after the age of 18, either when there is still some level of Social Services responsibility to them (up to 21 or up to 24 – see below) or once they have left the Leaving and After care services up until the age of 25. It should be noted that the majority of young people who leave care in a planned transition do not become homeless.

Group 2 – Young people aged 16 or 17 years old; who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system. This group are referred to as ‘non-care experienced’. These include young people who have left/been asked to leave the parental home or where other accommodation arrangements have broken down. In some cases there may be some historical connection with Social Services; the family may have been in receipt of Family Support services and/or the young person may formerly have been on the Child Protection or ‘At Risk’ register, but this was not ‘live’ at the point of presentation. These young people may present as homeless directly to Social Services or to the Housing Executive, and are then referred to Social Services via the Regional Good Practice Guidance.

Group 3 – Young people aged 18 – 25 years old; who present as homeless. These include young people (adults aged 18 plus) where their current living and sharing arrangements have broken down. In some cases again there may have been historical connection with Social Services, but not at the point of presentation/contact. These young people have no recourse to leaving and aftercare support or assistance from HSC Trusts under the legislation.

Where does the duty lie for youth homelessness?

2.16 As already noted the legislative requirement towards young people in terms of homeless need is encapsulated within both care related and housing legislation and policy. This was outlined at paragraphs 2.2 to 2.5. For ease of reference the relevant legislative duties are outlined below under the three groups of young homeless people covered by this study.

Group 1 – Young people who have been within the care system prior to the age of 16

The responsibility for these young people lies with Social Services up until the age of 21 and in some cases up to 24 years of age if they are in higher education. From a legislative point of view this is covered by the Children (NI) Order 1995 which defines a ‘looked after’ child as one who is in the care of the HSC Trust or who is provided with accommodation by the Trust. Furthermore the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 provided guidance in terms of entitlement for homeless applicants who are in need and vulnerable.

Joint working arrangements between the HSC Trusts and the Housing Executive - *Meeting the Accommodation and Support needs of 16 – 21-year-olds: Regional Good Practice agreed by the NI Housing Executive and the Health & Social Care Trusts*²⁷, together with the Housing Executive’s Homelessness Guidance Manual (December 2017) provide the relevant guidance underlying arrangements in relation to this grouping.

With the HSC Trust assuming corporate parenting responsibility, discussions and thinking about the young person’s various pathways commence in the teenage years. A pathway assessment should be completed by the young person’s 16th birthday and a pathway plan agreed by age 16 years and 3 months. For late entrants to care this should be completed within three months of their admission to care. HSC Trusts have different leaving and aftercare services; three Trusts have 16+ teams, one Trust operates a 14+ transition model and one Trust an 18+ model of service provision. Depending on the young person’s accommodation pathway from age 16/18 onwards, there may be interaction with the Housing Executive about the young person’s housing needs. However, in most cases for a young person leaving care the accommodation pathway involves services and/or accommodation provided either solely by the HSC Trust or through a jointly commissioned/jointly funded arrangement between the HSC Trust and the Housing Executive. A full list and details of this provision is outlined at paragraph 2.26.

²⁷ *Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of 16 – 21-year-olds, Regional Good practice guidance agreed by the NIHE and the HSC Trusts*, December 2014 and issued April 2015.

Group 2 – Young people aged 16 or 17 years old; who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system

The accommodation needs of these young people, if defined as a ‘child in need’, are the responsibility of the HSC Trusts. This is enshrined in the Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 as outlined earlier and is covered by the Joint working arrangements between the HSC Trusts and the Housing Executive. It is worth noting that young people in this group at risk of homelessness can present to either the Housing Executive or as a referral to the HSC Trusts.

Again, it is worth noting that the Housing Executive has a specific statutory duty in relation to this group, not least under the broad duties of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, but more specifically in terms of vulnerability on the basis of age alone, on the basis of leaving care, and in terms of young people at risk of sexual or financial exploitation. The Housing Executive’s Homelessness Guidance Manual (December 2017) notes the following in relation to 16- and 17-year-olds:

- The Housing Executive accepts and considers homeless presentations submitted by 16- and 17-year-olds and undertakes appropriate enquiries in the same way as with other homelessness presentations;
- In both age categories the Housing Executive reference the Regional Good Practice Guide.

In practice and from a functional point of view this duty is dispensed via the HSC Trusts – in all cases a UNOCINI²⁸ form and process is undertaken at the outset and an assessment is undertaken by the HSC Trust by an assigned team (either by a Gateway Social Worker or dedicated homelessness Social Worker). The assessment period is 10 days and the young person may be referred into the Assessment beds²⁹ available in their HSC Trust area or by arrangement in another HSC Trust area, by agreement in exceptional circumstances. During the assessment period the HSC Trust can carry out its investigations and determine whether the young person is a ‘child in need’ under the legislation, and whether they have a duty to provide accommodation to them.

The two routes from this position include that the young person may not become a looked after child and returns home or, if they are found to be a child in need and the HSC Trust has a duty to them, the young person becomes a ‘looked after child’. As a ‘child in need’ and by virtue of having no place to live, they therefore become a ‘looked after child’ under Article 21 of the Children (NI) Order 1995. In addition, it is worth noting that whilst some young people will come through Assessment beds in Jointly Commissioned Supported accommodation, and then possibly move to a care placement, in the case of other young people who are on the edge of care and who are assessed as being in immediate need of accommodation, the HSC Trust may place them at that point in a care placement including foster care, kinship foster care or residential care.

²⁸ The Regional UNOCINI assessment framework – Understanding the Needs of Children in Northern Ireland.

²⁹ There are 12 ‘Assessment beds’ Northern Ireland wide, located in four of the five HSC Trusts. These beds are available to the HSC Trusts for the assessment of young people aged 16 – 17 years old presenting as homeless, for the 10-day assessment period. This provision is paid for by the NI Housing Executive. Assessment beds are often referred to as Under 18 beds by Social Services.

Group 2 – Young people aged 16 or 17 years old; who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system/continued:

Placement³⁰ is then made in whatever suitable/appropriate accommodation is at the HSC Trust's disposal. This may include supported accommodation and also on some occasions the use of non-standard accommodation such as B&B's and hotels³¹.

The Regional Good Practice Guide states:

Where a decision to accommodate is made based on the outcome of a statutory assessment the "accommodated" young person will receive the same provisions as Looked After children and continued support will be provided in line with Children Order 1995 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 duties as applicable.

The number of young people in Group 2 are referenced in Section 4 (Table 6). Analysis of this data also indicates that whilst they were not in Social Services care at the time of presentation as homeless, many of them were previously known to Social Services.

Group 3 – Young people aged 18 – 25 years old; who have no history with Social Services or the care system

The primary legislation, for this group of young people is the Housing (NI) Order 1988. This was outlined at paragraphs 2. 2 to 2.4. The Homelessness Guidance Manual (December 2017) notes that young homeless people can include a person over compulsory school age but not yet 21, who has been or is at risk of sexual assault from someone residing in their accommodation, and who has been forced to leave or cannot remain there. In addition, it notes that a young person on the streets without adequate financial resources to live independently may be at risk of abuse or prostitution.

Furthermore, young people, who are homeless, can also be deemed to be in priority need if they fall into any of the other categories listed (see below), and the Homelessness Guidance Manual (December 2017) notes that Housing Executive staff should give careful consideration to the possibility of vulnerability, when assessing young people who are applying as homeless.

For ease of reference the following legislative definitions are important in relation to the accommodation needs of this group of young homeless people; that is those aged 18 – 25 years old with no current/prior care history.

- A person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation available for his or her occupation in the United Kingdom or elsewhere;
- A person shall not be treated as having accommodation unless it is accommodation which it would be reasonable for him or her to continue to occupy;

³⁰ The term placement is used throughout this report to cover a situation where an individual has been 'placed; in temporary accommodation.

³¹ As part of non-standard accommodation, the Housing Executive may use B&B and hotel accommodation when there is a lack of available alternatives. Housing Executive policy aims to keep this practice to a minimum on the grounds of cost, insecurity, and the suitability of the accommodation for vulnerable people. *The HSC Trusts also acknowledged that placements in B&B or hotels are deemed to be unregulated placements, and as such usage of B&B or hotels for 16/17-year-olds should be avoided where possible, only be used as a last resort and for the shortest possible time. Where the use of these types of non-standard accommodation arise the HSC Trust must safeguard the young person's welfare, determine landlord suitability, ensure that the young person is provided with a high level of support, that the landlord is assured of HSC Trust input and that immediate efforts are directed towards identifying and securing a more suitable arrangement.*

The following have a priority need for accommodation:

- A pregnant woman or a person with whom a pregnant woman resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- A person with whom dependent children reside or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- A person who is vulnerable as a result of old age, mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason, or with whom such a person resides or might reasonably be expected to reside;
- A person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness as a result of an emergency such as a flood, fire or other disaster;
- A person without dependent children, who satisfies the Housing Executive that he or she has been subject to violence and is at risk of violent pursuit or, if he or she returns home, is at risk of further violence;
- A young person who satisfies the Housing Executive that he or she is at risk of sexual or financial exploitation.

Developing an understanding of youth homelessness – policy context

2.17 Reference to youth homelessness in the current and previous homelessness strategies was noted at paragraphs 2.13 and 2.14. An independent evaluation³² of the 2012 - 2017 Homelessness strategy reviewed its 38 actions³³ and found that those relating specifically to youth homelessness had been completed. The report noted - *progress had been made in respect of sustaining and developing specific service provision for young people...* and referenced developments such as the establishment of an inter-agency Young Persons Regional Reference Group to monitor and address youth homelessness.

Completed actions included the following:

- Enhance partnership working for young people leaving justice
- Examine family mediation/intervention programmes
- Relevant agencies to collaborate on youth homelessness
- Review prevention programmes in respect of youth homelessness
- Review existing joint working for young homeless people
- Promote clear and flexible pathways to independence for young people

Reprioritisation of this 5-year Homelessness Strategy in 2014 enabled targeted focus on a number of measures to address the most significant impact of homelessness, including for those falling into vulnerable categories. This included a focus on Housing Solutions, the development of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), the development of a Central Access Point (CAP), the development of Housing First³⁴ and put in place measures to support sustainable tenancies.

The Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2022, *Ending Homelessness Together* (published April 2017) recognised the important role of other agencies in providing advice, assistance and support to prevent

³² *The Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012 – 2017 An Evaluation*, Fiona Boyle and Nicholas Pleace 2017.

³³ These had been reprioritised in 2014 to focus on homelessness prevention.

³⁴ Housing First refers to an arrangement whereby settled housing with a package of support is offered as an alternative to hostel provision to households who have a history of homelessness and instability. It differs from floating support in that the offer of support is not time-limited; and it differs from supported housing in that while the housing is offered with a package of support, the household's continued occupancy is not dependent on them continuing to accept the support offered.

households reaching crisis point. The five strategic objectives outlined are relevant for all homeless households irrespective of age; these are to prioritise the prevention of homelessness, to secure suitable accommodation and appropriate support for homeless households, to further understand and address the complexities of chronic homelessness and to have the right delivery mechanisms, measurement and monitoring in place to oversee and deliver the strategy.

Wider policy context

2.18 The discussion on youth homelessness sits within a wider policy context in relation to both the right to housing, and rights and responsibilities in relation to homelessness. The Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012 - 2017³⁵ noted the vision for everyone to have access to good quality housing at a reasonable cost. The strategy noted that *a home is at the heart of people's lives and good quality, reasonably-priced housing contributes significantly to creating a safe, healthy and prosperous society*³⁶.

2.19 The Common Selection Scheme (effective from November 2000, and also referred to as the Housing Selection Scheme) provides a common waiting list; representing a single gateway into social housing in Northern Ireland. The Common Selection Scheme consists of a set of rules which govern access, assessment and allocation to social housing; this is administered by the Housing Executive and adhered to by all participating social housing landlords. In the context of any discussion on homelessness it is important to note that the Housing Executive allocates housing according to an applicant's point score on this waiting list, and FDA status is worth 70 points³⁷.

2.20 Another important area of policy context was the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations³⁸. The Department for Communities (DfC) commenced work on this review in 2013; the overall aim is to produce a better range of solutions to meet housing need and in particular an improved system for the most vulnerable applicants to the Common Selection Scheme, including those who are homeless. The *Consultation on Proposals*³⁹ published by the Department for Communities in 2017 put forward a total of 20 proposals to make the allocations process more fair, transparent and effective for all.

2.21 From 2016 onwards the Housing Executive has adopted and now delivers Northern Ireland wide a Housing Solutions and Support approach to any person who contacts them with a housing issue. Housing Solutions was introduced initially as a pilot and then across all offices from September 2016 to March 2019. Full details of the Housing Solutions approach are outlined in the *Housing Solutions Handbook* (February 2017) and the Housing Solutions form. The Handbook notes *our aim is to offer effective, relevant housing advice and information at the earliest possible stage*⁴⁰. The Housing Solutions approach includes the following steps:

³⁵ *Facing the Future: The Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017*. In the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive since January 2017, this strategy has not been superseded, and is deemed under civil service rules to continue.

³⁶ Department for Social Development (2015) *Facing the Future: Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland*. Belfast: DSD p.4 Available online at: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dsd/facing-the-future-housing-strategy.pdf [Accessed 25 January 2019]

³⁷ FDA status is the second highest point-scoring criterion; the highest is intimidation which is worth 200 points.

³⁸ This was part of commitments set out in the Housing Strategy 2012 - 2017 and the draft Programme for Government (PFG)

³⁹ Department for Communities (2017) *A Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations* Belfast: DfC pp 111-114 Available online at: www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/communities/AW-041017%200641%20Housing%20Consultation%20Review%20of%20Social%20Housing%20Allocation.pdf [Accessed 05 February 2019].

⁴⁰ *Housing Solutions Handbook* (February 2017), page 9.

- Understand me and what I need;
- Understand my situation;
- Advise me on my realistic housing/support prospects;
- Address my immediate needs;
- Help me find a permanent housing solution or bespoke housing solution.

Any homelessness assessment is now therefore made within a wider customer contact via a Housing Solutions interview. Where there is reason to believe that a customer may be homeless or threatened with homelessness, the Housing Executive staff member is required to open a homelessness case, and the procedure documented in the Homeless Guidance Manual is then followed.

The new approach led to a change in job titles and job roles, as well as the number of personnel involved in homeless decisions. Prior to the implementation of Housing Solutions, homeless decisions per se were taken by Senior Housing Officers (Level 5) on the basis of investigations and evidence gathered by Housing Officers (around 300). A total of 62 Senior Housing Officers⁴¹ had this responsibility across Northern Ireland in the period before Housing Solutions was introduced. Housing Solutions included the introduction of the Housing Advisor role; with 148 Housing Advisors now responsible for homelessness assessments and 204 Patch Managers responsible for any homelessness assessments arising from transfer applicants.

2.22 Transformation to this new way of working has included some key changes, relevant to all homeless applicants including young people. Research for the Housing Executive entitled *Homelessness Service User Journeys* (published March 2021)⁴² highlighted some positive early findings in terms of Housing Solutions; this research noted: *the Housing Solutions approach was seen as a very positive step forward as a mechanism to help a service user through the homeless journey*⁴³. These included continuity of the housing advisor throughout the individual's contact with the Housing Executive, identification of needs through the Housing Solutions form and questions, Housing Solutions clinics in temporary accommodation hostels⁴⁴, and the provision of specialist knowledge and expertise where required.

It is also worth noting at this point that the delivery model is that a Housing Advisor can deal with any age group or household type; applicants are allocated to Housing Advisors on a rolling basis rather than specific to their interests or expertise. One departure from this is the delivery model in Belfast where there are two Housing Advisors with specific and exclusive operational focus on young people. Based at the Housing Centre, these two members of staff are located in the HOME (Housing Options Made Easy) team.

⁴¹ Regional breakdown – 22 in Belfast Region, 19 in North Region and 21 in South Region.

⁴² *Homelessness Service User Journeys – A Report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive*, Fiona Boyle Associates, March 2021.

⁴³ *Ibid*, page 54.

⁴⁴ A hostel is temporary accommodation which is usually supported. It would normally have the following features: on-site staff operating out of a central office, controlled access to the property, close internal supervision of movement and frequent inspections undertaken within the property, the provision of a significant degree of on-site services such as food and communal space/facilities. It includes those managed by the voluntary sector as well as the Housing Executive.

2.23 The Supporting People programme was introduced in Northern Ireland in 2003. Its aim is to *commission housing support services aimed at improving the quality of life and independence of vulnerable people*. Again this is an important contextual factor when thinking about youth homelessness, not least because Supporting People have a thematic group on young people and fund a range of accommodation and non-accommodation-based housing support services. These are referenced at paragraphs 2.27 and 2.28 in relation to the various Jointly commissioned projects and also the provision of Supporting People funding to other providers.

2.24 The Housing Executive has carried out a Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation. Part of this project included research conducted by Campbell Tickell (October 2020)⁴⁵ which noted a number of findings in relation to the provision of temporary accommodation for young homeless people. The report noted:

B&B accommodation is used for all household types, with a significant percentage of homeless people aged 16-17 and 18-25 in B&Bs, at least initially. This is of concern, because young people would be considered vulnerable and would usually require support which is unlikely to be available in this type of accommodation. However, a B&B placement may be very short and lead ultimately to a different form of temporary accommodation, including supported accommodation for vulnerable young people funded under the Supporting People programme⁴⁶.

Elsewhere in this report the research consultants note that the use of B&B accommodation in Northern Ireland is lower compared to all the other jurisdictions (only 3% of all households in temporary accommodation in September 2018). They noted – *it may be that this is in part because voluntary sector hostels in Northern Ireland are able to fulfil a similar function to B&Bs elsewhere⁴⁷*. However, they also note a high usage of private single lets⁴⁸ (68%), although there is no breakdown of this by age or type of household. Another interesting factor is that compared to the other UK jurisdictions supported temporary accommodation (mainly hostels) is used extensively; and that this is provided via ring-fenced Supporting People funding⁴⁹.

The Housing Executive noted that following the Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation project, and building on the Reset Plan, ‘Homeless to Home’, a Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation (2022-27) has been drafted and will be issued for consultation in Autumn 2021. It seeks to address issues identified in the course of the Review, including lessons learned during the pandemic, and aims to ensure that the Housing Executive will be able to meet both the accommodation and support needs of homeless customers at the point of need.

2.25 The HSC Board and the Housing Executive are currently working on a Review of Jointly Commissioned/Funded projects. This is due for completion by September 2021.

⁴⁵ *Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation*, A report for the NI Housing Executive, Campbell Tickell, October 2020

⁴⁶ The data that would allow examination of the extent to which this is true are not available.

⁴⁷ Campbell Tickell report, Op cit, page 43.

⁴⁸ Single Lets: are rental properties provided by private landlords, some of which are managed by other agencies.

⁴⁹ Campbell Tickell report, Op cit, page 41.

Current Services – Accommodation and Support

2.26 This sub-section reviews the range and types of services including accommodation-based services available to young homeless people. This exercise has been carried out with reference to the three groups of youth homelessness outlined above. The available accommodation options are then outlined in more detail in paragraphs 2.27 to 2.38.

Group – Youth Homeless	Accommodation options
Group 1 - Young people who have been within the care system prior to the age of 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residential care - Children’s homes - Foster care and kinship foster care - Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation projects - GEM Scheme - HSC Trust – Supported Lodgings - Temporary accommodation hostels – not age specific – open to all age groups⁵⁰. - Specific hostels for young people e.g., Foyers. See Appendix 2 for accommodation specifically aimed at young people. - Housing First for youth service (for LACed young people only) - Non-standard accommodation including B&B establishments and single lets - Eligible for social housing tenancy (HE or HA) from age 18 upwards - Private rented tenancy - Tenancy with Floating Support and Floating Support Step-down
Group 2 - Young people aged 16 or 17 years old; who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Residential care - Children’s homes - HSC Trust - Assessment beds - Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation projects - HSC Trust – Supported Lodgings - Foster care and kinship foster care - Other temporary accommodation for young people - Non-standard accommodation - Tenancy with Floating Support and Floating Support Step-down
Group 3 - Young people aged 18 – 25 years old; who have no history with Social Services or the care system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eligible for social housing tenancy (HE or HA) from age 18 upwards⁵¹ - Private rented tenancy - Temporary accommodation hostels – not age specific – open to all age groups. - Specific hostels for young people e.g., Foyers. - Non-standard accommodation including B&B establishments and single lets - Tenancy with Floating Support - Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation projects

It is worth noting that all Jointly Commissioned Supported accommodation projects and Supported Lodgings are subject to RQIA inspections as well as monitoring by Supporting People and the HSC Trusts. Some of the accommodation types outlined above e.g. B&Bs and hotels are unregulated and referred to as non-standard accommodation by the Housing Executive.

⁵⁰ Appendix 2 provides a summary of temporary accommodation provision by Council area for the whole of Northern Ireland, broken down by different client groups and needs. Client groups and needs include young people, single homeless with support needs, homeless families with support needs, people with alcohol problems, offenders or people at risk of offending, women at risk of domestic violence and single homeless crisis accommodation services.

⁵¹ Not all young people in Group 3 would have eligibility for social housing e.g. asylum seekers and separated children – see details of Transition service for separated children below.

Jointly Commissioned Supported Accommodation projects

2.27 At this point it is helpful to highlight that a number of accommodation projects have been identified and developed on the basis of need in partnership by the HSC Trusts and the NI Housing Executive. There are a total of 16 such projects, referred to as either Jointly Commissioned or Jointly Funded projects. Table 1 outlines these projects by HSC Trust area. These also include the 10-day assessment placements⁵².

Table 1: – Joint Commissioned Supported Accommodation Projects, March 2021

HSC Trust	Provider	Location	Units (per young person)			
			16/17-year-old		18+ (Max 2 years)	Total
			Max 2 years	10-day assessment		
Belfast	MACS	University Street, Belfast	9	-	9	18
	Simon Community NI	242 Antrim Road, Belfast	2 ⁵³	2	6	10
	BCM ⁵⁴	Grampian Avenue, Belfast	3	-	3	6
	Barnardo's	Leaving Care Service, Belfast	5	-	5	10
Northern	BCM	Tafelta Rise, Magherafelt	4	-	9	13
	Simon Community NI	Mount Street Mews, Coleraine	5	2	8	15
	Barnardo's	Grove Road, Ballymena	2	-	3	5
South Eastern	MACS	Downpatrick	3	2	3	8
		Lisburn	3	2	4	9
	BCM	Riverside, Bangor	5	2	5	12
Southern	MACS	Newry	3	-	4	7
	BCM	Thomas Street, Dungannon	2	-	2	4
Western	Action for Children	Rossory Grove, Enniskillen	4	-	9	13
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Francis Street, Derry	1	-	8	9
		Jefferson Court, Derry	5	2	18	25⁵⁵
	Praxis	Northland Road, Derry	2	-	4	6
Total			58	12	100	170

Source: NIHE, Supporting People

⁵² This was extended to 15 days during the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic.

⁵³ 2 units for under 18s funded, but 3 units used

⁵⁴ BCM – Belfast Central Mission.

⁵⁵ Jefferson Court has a temporary reduction from 25 to 20 units.

2.28 These Jointly Commissioned accommodation services are for young people with medium/high needs; they are all comprised of supported living arrangements with either shared or self-contained accommodation. These projects provide a total of 170 units across Northern Ireland as follows:

- There are 12 'Assessment beds' in four of the HSC Trust areas. These 12 spaces out of 170 (7% of Jointly Commissioned beds) are for young people aged 16 and 17 who are in need of assessment by HSC Trust and in immediate need of supported accommodation, whilst that assessment is being carried out. There are no assessment beds located in the Southern HSC Trust area, three Trust areas have two beds each and one Trust (South Eastern HSC Trust) has six assessment beds. These beds are used by the HSC Trusts for the assessment of young people aged 16 – 17 years old presenting as homeless; the Guidance provides for a 10-day period in which the HSC Trust can carry out its investigations and determine whether the young person is a 'child in need' under the legislation, and whether they have a duty to provide accommodation to them.
- 58 of the 170 beds (34%) are for care experienced young people aged 16/17 who are either making a planned transition from their care placement to supported accommodation or are moving there due to a placement disruption. This includes young people who have been in the care of the HSC Trust, where a placement (in a residential Children's Home, foster or kinship placement) has broken down in advance of their 18th birthday. This accommodation can be provided for a maximum of two years for each young person.
- Nearly two thirds (59%) of these beds are for young people aged 18 and over. Again these may be young people who have come through the care system (Group 1), or who have presented as homeless at ages 16 or 17 (Group 2) and now 'aged' into this provision. In a number of cases this accommodation may be used for vulnerable young people in Group 3, who are assessed under the homelessness legislation as being in priority need, and where there has been a discussion between the Housing Executive and the provider about the need for this type of accommodation and its suitability for the young person in question.

GEM scheme

2.29 The GEM (Going the Extra Mile) scheme is available in all five HSC Trust areas for young people transitioning into adulthood from Group 1 who have been in foster care arrangements. This provision is for 18 – 21-year-olds (can be extended beyond this upper age if young person still in education and in their best interests), and provides an accommodation and support placement for young people with varied levels of need from low to medium to high. The placement is in their foster care familial home, promoting continuity in the living arrangements in post care life. The scheme ensures that appropriate and agreed levels of financial and other supports are available to assist carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of these young people. Table 2 indicates that number of placements available in each HSC Trust area; with a total of 256 placements available (as of March 2021).

Table 2: Number of GEMS units by HSC Trust area

HSC Trust	Nr GEMS units
Belfast	72
Northern	43
South Eastern	38
Southern	35
Western	68
Total	256

Source: NIHE, Supporting People

HSC Trusts – STAY Supported Lodgings Service

2.30 Supported lodgings (STAY Supported Lodgings Service) is an accommodation-based service with the young person staying with a host family. Supported lodgings aims to give vulnerable young people aged 16+ who are in care or leaving care a safe and secure place to live as they prepare for independent living. The young person lives in the home of Supported lodgings ‘hosts’ who provide family-based support to help them gain confidence and skills for making the transition to adulthood. The Scheme has been operational in the Southern HSC Trust area for over 15 years and a current two-year pilot across the four other HSC Trust areas is being funded by the HSCB and Supporting People. This is a jointly commissioned service for those aged 16 plus.

Referrals can be made to this service by both HSC Trusts and the Housing Executive in line with eligibility criteria for the service and clear pathways in and out of the provision. This enables the Housing Executive to meet its statutory obligations on homelessness, and the HSC Trusts to provide a good social care option for housing within a familial environment for some young people.

Table 3 covers the supported lodgings provision for young people defined as single homeless with support needs. This provision is aimed at young people across the three groups; for young people in Group 1 who are in care and coming up to their 18th birthday this may be a suitable option – in particular for 16/17 year old looked after children transitioning from care, for young people in Group 2 who present as homeless to the Housing Executive or to a HSC Trust and who have been assessed as a ‘child in need’ at the age of 16/17 years and for any young person (whether care experienced or not) moving from Groups 1 or 2 into the age group (18 plus) of Group 3. This may include young people aged 16 – 21 plus who are stepping down from co-funded supported accommodation schemes.

Table 3: Supported Lodgings by HSC Trust area

HSC Trust	Provider	Name of service	Target nr. of units ⁵⁶
Belfast	Belfast HSC Trust	STAY Supported Lodgings Service	10
Northern	Northern HSC Trust	STAY Supported Lodgings Service	10
South Eastern	South Eastern HSC Trust	STAY Supported Lodgings Service	10
Southern	Southern HSC Trust	STAY Supported Lodgings Service	16 ⁵⁷
Western	Western HSC Trust	STAY Supported Lodgings Service	10
Total			56

Source: HSCB

Housing First for Youth Service

2.31 The Housing First for Youth Service was developed in 2018 as a partnership initiative between Simon Community NI, NHSCT and the Housing Executive, targeted at the most complex young people and delivered at the times when the young people require it. This requires accommodation and community-based elements, to be delivered in a large urban centre with diverse populations and providing a range of life skills. This new and creative approach is an extension of Joint Commissioned Services within NHSCT and will be an extension of the Supported Accommodation delivered to NHSCT by Simon Community NI (SCNI).

The model draws on and is informed by similar models operating effectively in some local authorities in England, incorporating the Housing First for Youth core principles. Essentially it is intended to deliver a bespoke service that is resilient and flexible, targeted at the most complex young people and delivered at times when the young people are most vulnerable and most in need of support. The service comprises of 10 support staff, 2 Senior Practitioners and a manager, who work a 24/7 rota providing support through day and night. Young people are referred to the service age 16-17, there are currently 6 young people in service; at this point this is for LACed young people in Group 1.

Transition Service for separated children

2.32 This is a commissioned service by BHSC to provide accommodation and support to young people aged 16-17 years who are defined as separated children. Bespoke accommodation is provided in the form of three independent flats for three young people.

Other Temporary Accommodation and services for young people

2.33 Providers in the voluntary and community sector provide a range of other temporary accommodation and services for specific groupings of young people. The primary client groups, as defined by Supporting People, are young people at risk, young people leaving care, single homeless with support needs and Foyers for young people. These are deemed to be medium to low support accommodation-based services, and are outlined in Table 4.

⁵⁶ There is a target of 10 units per HSC Trust by the end of 31st March 2022, with acknowledgement that a higher number may be needed e.g. 20 units per HSC Trust area.

⁵⁷ The STAY project was already up and running in the Southern HSC Trust area over the last 15 plus years. As a result the project already has 16 units available in this Trust area, with approved hosts.

Table 4: Other Temporary Accommodation and services for young people by HSC Trust area and provider

HSC Trust	Provider	Name of service	Nr. of units
Belfast	North Belfast Housing Association Ltd	Flax Foyer	37
	Simon Community NI	Malone Foyer ⁵⁸	32
Western	Apex Housing Association	Strand Foyer	48
	Praxis Care Group	Northlands Step Down ⁵⁹	15
	Shelter NI Ltd ⁶⁰	SL – Supported Housing Omagh	11
		SL – Supported Housing Omagh – Step Down	10
Total			163

Source: NIHE, Supporting People

In addition, it is worth noting that young people in Group 3, who are deemed to be in priority need and who are eligible for temporary accommodation, may be referred to what can be defined as generic temporary accommodation for adults. Details of such hostels and projects are outlined in Appendix 2. The relevant hostels for single homeless young people may fall into the following categories - for single homeless with support needs, people with alcohol problems and offenders or people at risk of offending. There are around 1,500 units of supported temporary accommodation funded from the Supporting People programme available to the Housing Executive.

Temporary Accommodation - Use of non-standard accommodation

2.34 If temporary accommodation in hostels or other placements are not available, and if the young person falls into Group 3 (aged 18 – 25 years) and fulfils the criteria for temporary accommodation under the legislation, they may be offered accommodation by way of non-standard accommodation in a B&B or hotel or in a single let. In addition, in some circumstances non-standard accommodation is used for young people in Group 2. There are around 1,200 places in privately-owned single lets, available to the Housing Executive, plus on average around 50 households each night placed in B&B accommodation⁶¹.

Floating Support for young people

2.35 Further non-accommodation-based services for young people are provided in the form of Floating support; these are deemed to be low level support services. The primary client group for these services is defined by Supporting People as Young People at risk. Floating support can be provided to young people across all tenures (social rented, private rented etc.). Table 5 indicates that the majority of providers of this service are community/voluntary sector providers with only one service delivered by a HSC Trust (Western). There is a total of 769 units of floating support provision for young people.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that Malone Foyer accommodates young people with high support needs, and does not operate as a Foyer model. It operates as temporary accommodation for 18 – 21-year-olds.

⁵⁹ Not fully accommodation based with 24/7 staff. Praxis delivered this as Floating Support

⁶⁰ This includes 10 units of short-term accommodation and support delivered as Floating Support model.

⁶¹ Op cit, Campbell Tickell report, page 13.

Table 5: Other Temporary Accommodation and services for young people by HSC Trust area and provider

HSC Trust	Provider	Name of service	Nr. of units
Belfast	MACS	MACS Floating Support Service – Belfast	87 ⁶²
Northern ⁶³	Triangle Housing Association	Triangle Floating Support and Step Down	175
South Eastern	BCM	Housing Support – Newtownards	48
	MACS	Downpatrick Floating Support	79
	MACS	Lisburn Floating Support	72
Southern	MACS	Newry Floating Support	25
	BCM	Housing Support – Dungannon, Armagh and Magherafelt	92
	Simon Community NI	Simon Community Floating Support	30
Western	Action for Children	Action for Children Floating Support Service and Step Down	46
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Youth Accommodation Support project (YASP)	75
	Western HSC Trust	Peripatetic Tenancy Support scheme (Aftercare Floating Support)	40
Total			769

Source: NIHE, Supporting People

Permanent Tenancy – Social Housing

2.36 As noted earlier, once a young person is 18 years of age, they can apply via the Housing Executive and the Housing Solutions application form and process, to be considered for a social housing tenancy. Paragraph 2.3 outlined the four tests which are part of this process; and if the young person passes these and is deemed to have priority need, they will then acquire housing points and be made an offer on the basis of these, when they are the top of the allocations list. The young person may acquire further points, than the 70 points allocated as a full duty applicant. It is worth noting that the report by Campbell Tickell noted that the greatest allocation of FDA status (55%)⁶⁴ was on the basis of vulnerability – on the grounds of old age, mental ill-health, physical ill-health or disability of youth⁶⁵.

Permanent Tenancy – Private rented sector

2.37 Another housing option available for young people aged 18 plus is a tenancy (either individually or in a sharing arrangement) in the private rented sector. This housing tenure has grown considerably in the last 20 years⁶⁶. Access to private renting requires the young person to provide a monetary deposit, at least one month's rent in advance and a guarantor.

⁶² For 21/22 there is an increase on this number by 30

⁶³ Generic Service for both Single Homeless with Support Needs and Young People at Risk.

⁶⁴ The figure of 55% refers to Priority Need status as per the four homelessness tests outlined at paragraph 2.3.

⁶⁵ Op cit, Campbell Tickell report, page 53.

⁶⁶ Data from the 2016 NI House Condition Survey on the distribution of stock by tenure indicates that 18% of stock is in the private rental sector (having surpassed the social rented sector at 16%). This indicates a significant increase from 12% of the housing market as noted in the House Condition Survey, 2006.

Other Accommodation pathways

2.38 It should be noted that young people may take other accommodation pathways in their homeless journey; these can be categorised as follows:

- Return home – this may be to their parental/family home or to another family member;
- Hidden homeless – the young person may go and stay with a friend or in another setting, where they have no specific accommodation of their own or accommodation rights. This is often referred to as ‘sofa surfing’;
- Rough sleeping – the young person may move into street homelessness, again with no specific accommodation or accommodation rights.

Discussion of the suitability and accessibility of all types of accommodation and services for young people is covered in Sections 5 and 6.

Introduction

3.1 This chapter, provided by Professor Nicholas Pleace, Centre for Housing Policy, The University of York explores the evidence on youth homelessness, looking at research from Great Britain, Europe and North America. The chapter looks at the causes of youth homelessness, encompassing research on the trajectories that young adults follow into youth homelessness and examining research on the prediction of youth homelessness. Barriers to exiting youth homelessness are then explored, before the chapter looks at evidence on effective systems and services for youth homelessness prevention and for providing sustainable exits from homelessness for young people.

Defining ‘youth’ homelessness

3.2 Before describing the international evidence on youth homelessness and effective solutions for preventing and ending youth homelessness, it is worth briefly noting that the definition of youth homelessness is not consistent. Scandinavian researchers tend to define youth homelessness as people aged 18-25, mirroring practice in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. However, in other countries, the age range for people defined as ‘young’ homeless people can extend to someone in their early 30s or define someone as over 21 as being too ‘old’ to be experiencing youth homelessness⁶⁷.

3.3 As will be described in more detail below, gender differences in youth homelessness and their interrelationships with administrative and service responses to homelessness can also mean that there are inconsistencies in definition. In Northern Ireland, as in England, Wales and Scotland, young women with dependent children who find themselves experiencing statutory homelessness, i.e. owed a duty for rehousing under the varying provisions of the four sets of UK homelessness laws, tend to be (re)classified as a ‘homeless family’. While still young themselves, young people who have transitioned from dependent child/teenager to parent, can be reclassified as effectively no longer ‘young’ and treated as full adults, even though they may have support needs that would not be present in someone who was in their mid to late 20s, or older.

3.4 The administrative line between someone who is legally a *child* and someone who is an adult is significant in understanding and comparing responses to youth homelessness and this line is not drawn at the same point across different countries. While there is NGO involvement, across most of the economically developed World the State, i.e. central, regional and local government, takes direct responsibility for systems designed to stop abuse and destitution in childhood. Child protection systems can stop at a relatively young age, say 16 or 18, or continue to take responsibility for a young person into their early 20s, depending on how they are set up and their operational rules about which young people should be subject to social services protection. As the next section discusses, the evidence base indicates that, globally, transition from being a child under social services care to becoming a young adult is associated with a heightened risk of youth homelessness. The point at which this happens at a young person’s life and the ways in which it happens, varies across countries.

⁶⁷ Quilgars, D. (2010) Youth Homelessness in O’Sullivan, E. et al (eds) *Homelessness Research in Europe* Brussels: FEANTSA, pp. 187-210.

3.5 Alongside this, there are inconsistencies in entitlements around social protection, such as welfare payments and access to social housing in those countries that provide it. In one country, the 'safety net' available to an 18-year-old can include the right to a social housing tenancy and the same level of working age welfare benefits available to an older adult. In many countries, however, a young person cannot hold a tenancy until they are 21 or older and cannot claim adult level welfare benefits. For decades, following the belief that youth homelessness would be discouraged if benefit levels were lower, England has restricted welfare payments in general and in relation to housing, for example in expecting someone reliant on benefits, who is aged under 35, to share private rented accommodation under most circumstances⁶⁸.

3.6 The definition of youth and how that definition intersects with how someone's rights to support and their legal entitlements from the State therefore creates important differences in the ways in which 'youth' homelessness is experienced across different countries. Managing the transition between childhood and adulthood happens at different points in young people's life course in different countries, with varying levels of support, meaning that experience and practice from other countries is not necessarily always directly comparable to Northern Ireland.

The causation of youth homelessness

3.7 Across the UK, Europe, North America and Australasia, youth homelessness is clearly associated with someone not being able to transition from the dependency of childhood to the self-reliance of adulthood, because they lack the emotional, practical and financial resources and supports that are available to most young people as they transition to adulthood. As has been noted elsewhere, for most young people leaving home for the first time, parental advice and support, both practical and financial, means that they leave home with what is effectively a safety net underneath them⁶⁹. The parental safety net that is thrown under most young people when they leave home can be limited, flawed or absent for different reasons⁷⁰:

- Relationship breakdown resulting in parent(s)/family actively ejecting a young person from the family home. This can include young people being forced to leave when a lone parent acquires a new partner, parental intolerance when a young person reports that they do not have a cisgender/heterosexual⁷¹ identity, i.e. identify as LGBT⁷², or emotional tensions between parent(s) and a teenager just reaching what parent(s)/family regard as a breaking point and the teenager being 'thrown out'.
- Relationship breakdown associated with the emergence of high and complex support needs in a young person that mean it is difficult or impractical for them to remain in the parental home, specifically mental illness and/or addiction. Here the causation of youth homelessness may not be associated with parental action or inaction, but rest on parents facing challenges around coping with a young person with complex support needs.

⁶⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/housing-and-universal-credit/renting-from-private-landlord>

⁶⁹ Schwan, K., Gaetz, S., French, D., Redman, M., Thistle, J., & Dej, E (2018) *What Would it Take? Youth Across Canada Speak Out on Youth Homelessness Prevention* Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press.

⁷⁰ Benjaminsen, L (2016) The variation in family background amongst young homeless shelter users in Denmark. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 19(1), pp.55-73; Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S. and Pleace, N. (2008) *Review of Youth Homelessness in the UK*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

⁷¹ Cisgender refers to someone who gender identity matches their gender assigned at birth, e.g. a woman born as a woman.

⁷² Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) is the term used by UK governments, sometimes the acronym LGBTQI (as above but a wider definition, including queer and intersex) is employed.

- Violent or abusive relationship breakdown, where a young person is forced to leave the parental/family home because of physical and/or sexual abuse.
- Limited parental capacity to provide support linked to household resources, including being unable to offer continued housing when child-related welfare benefits cease to be available because a teenager has grown too old and an incapacity to provide much financial or practical support because of extremely limited financial resources and/or multiple pressures on time (e.g. caring for younger children, relatives with support needs).
- A young person transitioning to adulthood is leaving an institutional setting in a context where parental support has either broken down or is not available for another reason, such as bereavement. There are longstanding relationships between leaving a children's home or young offenders' institute/prison and heightened risk of youth homelessness. Young people leaving foster care can also be in a similar position.

3.8 These various pathways through youth homelessness are not mutually exclusive, but while there is evidence that experiencing youth homelessness is more likely if one or more of these conditions is true and that there are multiple pathways into youth homelessness⁷³, the risk of homelessness is skewed towards certain groups of young people. When routes into statutory homelessness for young people were examined in England in the mid-2000s, alongside the causation of family homelessness, it was found that their general position was worse than that of families with dependent children seeking assistance. The research noted:

*...young people accepted as homeless 16-17-year-olds are a far more disadvantaged and socially excluded group than families accepted as homeless. These young people's childhoods were often marred by extremely difficult family relations, and many had also had a severely disrupted education. Large proportions had experienced mental health and/or substance misuse problems, and they were far likelier than their peers in the general population to not be in education, employment or training.*⁷⁴

Reviewing the evidence and state of youth homelessness in 2008, Quilgars *et al* noted⁷⁵:

Young people who have experienced disruption or trauma during childhood and/or who are from poor socio-economic backgrounds are at increased risk of homelessness. The main 'trigger' for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown (usually with parents or stepparents). For many, this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involves violence.

3.9 A 2016 systematic review of the evidence on youth homelessness, exploring studies that had involved 13,599 young people experiencing homelessness across 24 countries, found that poverty was most clearly associated with youth homelessness across the World. Family conflict, i.e. various forms of relationship breakdown and experience of abuse and violence causing young people to leave the parental/family home were also identified as significant causes of youth homelessness⁷⁶.

3.10 The existing evidence indicates that youth homelessness is often a process, rather than a single event. Ethnographic and sociological research, looking in detail at the experiences of young

⁷³ Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *Young Homeless People* London: Palgrave Macmillan; Quilgars, D. *et al* (2013) *Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions* London: Centrepoint; Kidd, S.A. *et al* (2017) The 2015 national Canadian homeless youth survey: Mental health and addiction findings. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 62(7), pp.493-500.

⁷⁴ Pleace, N. *et al* (2008) *Statutory Homelessness in England: The experience of families and 16-17-year-olds* London: Communities and Local Government, p. 280.

⁷⁵ Quilgars, D. *et al* (2008) *op. cit.* pp. xii.

⁷⁶ Embleton, L. *et al.* (2016) Causes of child and youth homelessness in developed and developing countries: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of the American Medical Association: Paediatrics*, 170(5), pp.435-444.

people experiencing homelessness over time, has highlighted the ways in which young people try to avoid living rough or entering homelessness services, by finding accommodation with relatives, friends and acquaintances. A broad association between the experience of 'sofa surfing' and youth homelessness, moving between one informal, often precarious, living arrangement after another has often been reported in social research⁷⁷. Youth homelessness may often be 'hidden' homelessness because it can often take this form, making everything from accurately counting the number of young people experiencing homelessness⁷⁸ through to facing multiple challenges in finding ways to connect them with the right services, including homelessness prevention.

3.11 While more research is needed in this specific area, there is some worrying evidence that by the time young people reach homelessness services, again including preventative and rapid rehousing services, their cumulative experience of *hidden* forms of homelessness can be considerable. Rather than being ejected from, having to leave or run away from the parental or family home and then appearing the same day at a preventative or homelessness service, the actual trajectory of a young person through homelessness might have been weeks, months, or longer, living in what may have been one precarious and potentially unsafe situation after another.

3.12 While the somewhat unhelpful term of 'hidden' homelessness can make these experiences sound less severe than being on the street or in emergency accommodation, the lived reality of hidden homelessness can be one of no legal security, no privacy, poor physical safety, cramped and inadequate living conditions, very low income, poor diet and sometimes more than one traumatic experience. Living in precarious, informal arrangements, experiencing the effects of homelessness for some time before finally presenting themselves to a formal homelessness service, whether it is statutory or NGO or some combination thereof, can mean that a young person has experienced marked downturns in their health and wellbeing, arising from homelessness, before they reach formal homelessness services.

3.13 Addiction, mental health problems and other support needs, including the experience of trauma, can arise during what can be protracted experiences of youth homelessness. The immediate cause of youth homelessness may be damaging to a young person, but if they react to homelessness, as can be the case, by relying on informal arrangements with relatives, friends and acquaintances and only approach formal services when these arrangements have broken down, the process of creating a sustainable exit from homelessness becomes all the more complex.

Predicting youth homelessness

3.14 There is a clear need to determine when the transition from childhood to young adulthood is at risk of going wrong and result in homelessness. Accurate anticipation of youth homelessness has the advantage of stopping both the immediate damage of becoming homeless, alongside an evidence base that suggests a lot of damage might be done by young people often experiencing 'hidden' forms

⁷⁷ Mayock, P. and Sheridan, S. (2017) *Living in Limbo: Homeless Young People's Paths to Housing* Dublin: Focus Ireland; Quilgars, D. *et al.* (2008) *op. cit.*; Fitzpatrick, S. (2000) *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ Pleace, N. and Bretherton, J. (2013) *Measuring homelessness and housing exclusion in Northern Ireland: A test of the ETHOS typology*. Belfast, UK: Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

of homelessness, over what can be protracted periods, before they approach formal prevention and homelessness services⁷⁹.

3.15 Determining the risk factors for youth homelessness has been challenging in the past, one near universal risk factor is poverty, but while it can be a cause of homelessness in and of itself, the experience of poverty during childhood is much more widespread than the experience of homelessness. A wide-ranging estimate, produced by Cambridge, extrapolating from a survey, in 2015, suggested that, across the UK, around 1.3 million young people aged 16- 24 have slept rough or in an unsafe place (including sofa surfing), and just under 300,000 were doing so on any one night⁸⁰. This is a much greater number than some earlier estimates, which were under 100,000, based on contacts with homelessness services⁸¹. Nevertheless, while the true figure may lie somewhere within this range, some four million children are in poverty at any given point in the UK⁸², a number that will increase due to the economic effects of COVID 19.

3.16 Equally, research, reports from service practitioners and from the homelessness sector, both in the UK and internationally, are indicating increasing evidence of an association with experience of youth homelessness and identifying as LGBT. FEANTSA, the European Federation of Homelessness Organisations, has argued that there is some evidence that between 20-40% of young people experiencing homelessness identify as LGBT, which means that the collective response to youth homelessness, both in terms of prevention and homelessness service design need to be reconsidered⁸³. However, while there is research evidence showing that cultural, parental or familial intolerance, for example a situation where homophobia is widespread, including some data suggesting 24% of young people who are homeless identify as LGBT⁸⁴, most young people who identify as LGBT in the UK are not homeless and most of the young people experiencing homelessness identify as cisgender/heterosexual. Again, as with poverty, there is an apparent association, although it is less well evidenced than the association with poverty and more work is required, but a young person identifying as being LGBT is not an accurate predictor of homelessness.

3.17 The clearest risk factors for youth homelessness are experience of social and child protection services and contact with the criminal justice system. Young people, who are mainly young men, who have a history of repeated offending and more specifically, of being repeatedly caught and repeatedly imprisoned for short periods of time, are at heightened risk of youth homelessness⁸⁵. Contact with the care system while a child is an indicator of heightened risk of youth homelessness in itself, but the risks become higher when a young person is someone who is transitioning from being a looked after child or child in care to adulthood⁸⁶.

⁷⁹ Homeless Link (2019) *Youth Homelessness: Scoping report July 2019* London: Homeless Link; Clarke, A. *et al.* (2015) *Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK: Final Report* Cambridge: CCHPR; Crisis (2012) *Young, Hidden and Homeless: Research Briefing* London: Crisis.

⁸⁰ Clarke, A. *et al.* (2015) *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Quilgars, D. *et al.* (2011) *op. cit.*

⁸² Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2020: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20>

⁸³ <https://www.feantsa.org/en/press-release/2018/05/17/press-release-time-to-act-20-40-of-homeless-youth-identify-as-lgbti?bcParent=27>

⁸⁴ <https://www.theproudtrust.org/resources/research-and-guidance-by-other-organisations/lgbt-youth-homelessness-a-uk-national-scoping-of-cause-prevalence-response-and-outcome/>

⁸⁵ Madoc-Jones, I. *et al.* (2018) Rethinking preventing homelessness amongst prison leavers *European Journal of Probation*, 10(3), pp.215-231.

⁸⁶ Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S., 2018. Homelessness in the UK: who is most at Risk? *Housing Studies*, 33(1), pp.96-116; Dixon, J. and Baker, C. (2012). The housing experiences of young people leaving care in England: What helps? *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and*

3.18 For decades, research has been drawing associations between clusters of characteristics, needs and experiences and the risk of recurrent and sustained homelessness. The first researchers to do this were Americans, drawing clear associations between protracted repeat homelessness, and the presence of addiction, mental illness, poor health and frequent contact with criminal justice services and homelessness⁸⁷. Similar patterns have long been identified in European and UK research, a mutually reinforcing relationship between criminality, addiction, mental illness and repeated and sustained, also sometimes known as ‘chronic’ homelessness⁸⁸. While this combination of high and complex needs exists in a mutually reinforcing relationship with sustained and recurrent homelessness, and thus if present in a young person might increase the risk of long-term homelessness, this combination of factors is, again, *not* an accurate predictor of homelessness, i.e. most people with these characteristics do not become homeless, at least for any length of time.

3.19 Attempts have been made to find clusters of characteristics that are associated with risks of homelessness in general and these same statistical techniques can be applied to the risk of youth homelessness. This can, at least in theory, help model the probability of homelessness, but has limitations, as poverty is a constant. This raises questions about the ‘patterns’ reported in homelessness, if poverty seems to be a necessary condition for homelessness, whereas other variables, in the absence of poverty, seem to lose some, or all, of their apparent association with homelessness, there are questions about what that is really telling us. Experiments in Los Angeles have suggested that targeting of homelessness prevention services might be enhanced by the use of these technologies, though again, the modelling is not a perfect predictor of homelessness actually occurring⁸⁹.

3.20 Some researchers think the real potential lies in what are sometimes termed predictive analytics, the combination of massive datasets with artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) systems. Experiments run with combinations of administrative data and AI/ML have the potential to track trajectories across homelessness and the nature of someone’s life before homelessness, allowing not just broad associations between sets of experiences to be clustered together to try to predict homelessness, but the creation of models based on actual experiences⁹⁰. In England, MHCLG has recently commissioned research on the potential for AI to predict homelessness linked to COVID 19⁹¹.

3.21 For youth homelessness, if data can be combined on experience at school, on any social services involvement and other issues at home and, in turn, mapped together with experiences since leaving the parental/family home or institutional care settings, there is the potential for AI to map

Family Work Journal, (32), p.26. Stein, M. (2006) Research review: Young people leaving care. *Child and family Social Work*, 11(3), pp.273-279.

⁸⁷ Culhane, D. (2018) *Chronic Homelessness* Center for Evidence-Based Solutions <http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/evidence-page-chronic-homelessness-April-2018.pdf>

⁸⁸ Nettleton, S., Neale, J. and Stevenson, C. (2012) Sleeping at the margins: a qualitative study of homeless drug users who stay in emergency hostels and shelters. *Critical Public Health*, 22(3), pp.319-328; Kemp, P.A., Neale, J. and Robertson, M. (2006) Homelessness among problem drug users: prevalence, risk factors and trigger events. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 14(4), pp.319-328.

⁸⁹ Von Wachter, T. *et al.* (2019) *Predicting and Preventing Homelessness in Los Angeles* California Policy Lab and The Poverty Lab, University of Chicago https://www.capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Predicting_and_Preventing_Homelessness_in_Los_Angeles.pdf; Rice, E. *et al.* (2018) Linking homelessness vulnerability assessments to housing placements and outcomes for youth. *Cityscape*, 20(3), pp.69-86.

⁹⁰ Culhane, D.P. (2016) The Potential of Linked Administrative Data for Advancing Homelessness Research and Policy *European Journal of Homelessness* 10(3) pp.109-126.

⁹¹ <https://tech.newstatesman.com/coronavirus/faculty-mhclg-deal-coronavirus-uk>

trajectories more accurately and for greater clarity and reliability in identifying risk factors. One recent example is a US AI system designed to identify which young people experiencing homelessness are at risk of addiction, which is also designed to help design the correct service interventions⁹². The University of Southern California also has a number of AI projects focused on different aspects of homelessness, including better management of the risks of HIV, addiction and suicide prevention among young people experiencing homelessness⁹³. These systems are perhaps more accurately described as focusing on addressing specific aspects of youth homelessness, rather than being a broader attempt at predicting which children will become homeless as young adults.

3.22 Childhood poverty is a near constant and there are very clear associations with family relationship breakdown, for multiple reasons including violence and abuse. These two factors appear to be the most important in explaining and in potentially predicting youth homelessness. While there is no algorithm for predicting youth homelessness with a very high degree of certainty, *combinations* of the risk factors listed below do appear to be make the chances of experiencing youth homelessness higher:

- Economic marginalisation/poverty
- Disruption to family life and family relationship breakdown including:
 - Involvement of social services as a child
 - Being taken into care as a child
 - Remaining in care or foster placements until reaching adulthood
 - Intolerance from family when identifying as LGBT
 - Experience of abuse or violence from parents or other family members
- Low educational attainment, associated with disruption to family life as a child
- Contact, particularly frequent contact, with the criminal justice system
- Problematic drug and/or alcohol use
- Mental health problems

Barriers to exiting youth homelessness

3.23 American research has also identified a clear pattern of ageing among people experiencing long-term and repeated homelessness associated with high support needs. There are US data indicating that the experience of repeat/sustained homelessness started when many of these people were young, with the emergence and exacerbation of what *became* acute support and treatment needs being associated with not being able to exit homelessness, i.e. issues with mental health, addiction, poor physical health and development of multiple and complex support needs often *followed*, rather than preceded, becoming homeless⁹⁴. This risk that youth homelessness will sometimes become long-term and recurrent homelessness extending through adult life means that understanding the barriers to exiting youth homelessness is very important.

⁹² Yadav, A. et al. (2020) Optimal and Non-Discriminative Rehabilitation Program Design for Opioid Addiction Among Homeless Youth, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth International Joint Conference on Artificial Intelligence* DOI: 10.24963/ijcai.2020/605

⁹³ <https://www.cais.usc.edu/projects/homelessness-related-projects>

⁹⁴ Culhane, D.P. et al. (2019) *A Data-driven Re-design of Housing Supports and Services for Aging Adults Who Experience Homelessness In New York City* http://works.bepress.com/dennis_culhane/225/

3.24 As has been noted elsewhere, youth homelessness is generally less likely in countries with extensive public health, welfare and social housing systems and where systems for child protection and the management of transitions from the care system to young adulthood exist within a well-resourced, integrated strategy⁹⁵. Nevertheless, associations between youth homelessness, traumatic experiences in childhood, family relationship breakdown and relative poverty, exist across Europe. Youth homelessness has also increased within some service-rich environments, i.e. countries where mainstream welfare and social housing systems are well developed and there is also relatively extensive provision of specialist services designed for homeless young people, examples include Denmark and Finland⁹⁶, France⁹⁷ and the Netherlands⁹⁸. This is part of a wider trend towards increases in youth homelessness across Europe⁹⁹, alongside longstanding problems of young people entering homelessness in North America¹⁰⁰ and Australia¹⁰¹.

3.25 The main risks of any form of homelessness becoming long-term or recurrent centre on three areas: access to informal support, personal resources and access to formal support¹⁰². Young people enter homelessness because they lack the social supports that are usually available, there is no 'bank of mum and dad' and more generally, the familial emotional and practical support that most young people have when leaving home is either limited or not available. Entering youth homelessness is also linked to socioeconomic status, a poor financial position, and sometimes low educational attainment and a weak position in the labour market, alongside sometimes experiencing issues with mental health, addiction and other issues with wellbeing, can mean that homeless young people face multiple challenges to establishing a home. Finally, any barriers to homelessness prevention and youth homelessness services become all the more important when a young person does not have the same level or personal resources or access to informal support that are usually available to someone entering adulthood.

3.26 Some research has highlighted the nuances and variation in social supports available to young people experiencing homelessness, including family as 'reliable and supportive'; family as 'interrupted and broken'; family as 'fragile and elusive'; and family as 'fluid and ambiguous'¹⁰³. A situation in which family is simply absent, or needs to be avoided, will occur, but the lived reality for many young people experiencing homelessness is that social supports will ebb and flow, there will be support, relationship breakdown and then support again, and that makes the experience of youth homelessness more complex than a simple, continual, absence of informal support.

⁹⁵ Benjaminsen, L. (2016) op. cit.;

⁹⁶ Benjaminsen, L. and Knutagård, M. (2016) Homelessness Research and Policy Development: Examples from the Nordic countries. *European Journal of Homelessness* 10(3), pp. 45-66.

⁹⁷ https://www.feantsa.org/download/france_final1217215808435700822.pdf

⁹⁸ <https://www.feantsa.org/download/netherlands-cfsh-jan-2017-final6094541413076791790.pdf>

⁹⁹ Fondation Abbé Pierre and FEANTSA (2020) *Fifth Overview of Housing Exclusion in Europe 2020* https://www.feantsa.org/public/user/Resources/OHEE/2020/Fifth_Overview_of_Housing_Exclusion_in_Europe.pdf

¹⁰⁰ Gaetz, S. et al. (2016) *The State of Homelessness in Canada 2016* Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness; US Department of Housing and Urban Development HUD (2020) 2019 *Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations* HUD: Washington DC.

¹⁰¹ Mackenzie, D. (2020) *Youth Homelessness: A Reform Agenda for Supporting Vulnerable Youth and Families* LC LSIC Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria Submission 394

¹⁰² Pleace, N. (2016) Researching Homelessness in Europe: Theoretical Perspectives *European Journal of Homelessness* 10(3), pp. 19-44.

¹⁰³ Parker, S. and Mayock, P. (2019) "They're Always Complicated but That's the Meaning of Family in My Eyes": Homeless Youth Making Sense of "Family" and Family Relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 40(4), pp.540-570.

3.27 Young people's own strengths, resilience and support networks mean that they create interim, sometimes precarious living arrangements with friends, relatives and acquaintances, rather than going to services, or only approach services when these arrangements break down¹⁰⁴. Orthodox routes to housing are not easily available, or may just simply be impractical, e.g. they cannot yet hold a tenancy, social housing has very long waiting lists and renting, let alone buying, is not an option in terms of how much income they are likely to be able to access. Seeing no route to the usual ways of securing a settled home, young people create alternatives, these alternatives may not be ideal, indeed they may be downright risky, but seeing no visible exit from their situation, they start living in alternative ways. The wider point here is that while they may face challenges around their own health and wellbeing and because of their socioeconomic position, young people are not without agency and not passive, they will try to find a way out of homelessness or to minimise the risks and effects of homelessness.

3.28 An interrelationship between sex work and youth homelessness is sometimes reported¹⁰⁵ and represents another dimension of finding an unorthodox way of living because the orthodox is not available. However, it is important not to assume that this sex work and youth homelessness generally exist alongside each other, not least because research on homelessness among young sex workers is often sampled from sex workers, not young homeless people in general. Equally, the reported links between youth homelessness and problematic drug and alcohol use need to be treated with caution, youth homelessness may reflect and enable a life of addiction, but *not* necessarily for the majority of young people experiencing homelessness and, again, addiction can *follow* the experience of becoming homeless¹⁰⁶.

3.29 Services may not reach young people until a crisis point arises, when their own informal arrangements break down and, as noted, the longer those informal arrangements have been going on, as sustained and recurrent 'hidden homelessness', the more the risk that a young person will have developed higher and more complex support needs than when they first became homeless. Awareness of services, information about services and the wide availability of preventative services are all important in reducing youth homelessness because of these issues. These services must also be sufficient in scale, scope and resource to meet need and properly interconnected via a strategic framework that means there is effective joint working with health, education training and employment, social care, addiction, criminal justice and social housing services.

3.30 Barriers to exiting youth homelessness can be summarised as follows:

- Limits to personal resources, including living with mental health problems and other support needs, alongside being in a disadvantageous economic position.
- Family supports are absent or erratic.
- Seeing no other option, young people rely on their own resources to find accommodation and sustain themselves, these arrangements can be both precarious and risky and they can have the effect of protracting the experience and the negative impacts of homelessness, e.g. sustained sofa surfing.

¹⁰⁴ Mayock, P. and Parker, S. (2020) Homeless young people 'strategizing' a route to housing stability: service fatigue, exiting attempts and living 'off grid'. *Housing Studies*, 35(3), pp.459-483.

¹⁰⁵ Watson, J. (2017) *Youth Homelessness and Survival Sex: Intimate relationships and gendered subjectivities*. London: Routledge.

¹⁰⁶ Pleace, N. (2008) *Effective Services for Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Scotland: Evidence from an international review* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

- Use of preventative, rapid rehousing and support services may only occur when informal arrangements have broken down and these services must be properly resourced and integrated into health, education, employment and social services, criminal justice and social housing systems, in order to work effectively.

3.31 The importance of wider factors must also be acknowledged. Young people generally are at heightened risk of housing exclusion and homelessness across Europe, it can be difficult to either earn enough and/or have enough support from welfare systems to make reasonable standard housing affordable. There is less well-paid, full-time work, and in the UK, experience of the labour market for young people is too often that of precarious, low paid, part-time works that do not bring in enough income to make private renting affordable, let alone consider purchasing a home. The housing market is also severely dysfunctional, failing to supply adequate and affordable homes and openly described by UK central government as ‘broken’¹⁰⁷.

Preventing youth homelessness

3.32 North American evidence explores systems that target preventative services on ‘at risk’ groups, including children and young people at risk of experiencing youth homelessness. One issue here is reliable identification of who exactly is at risk, as was discussed above, another is the notion of targeting prevention more generally, which has not been the practice in the UK. The quality of the evidence base for targeted youth homelessness prevention has also been questioned¹⁰⁸. Existing data indicate that universal, or near universal, offers of homelessness prevention, as used across much of the UK, seems to have generated better results than only offering prevention to specific individuals or families, defined as ‘at risk’, as is the case in the USA or Canada¹⁰⁹.

3.33 The key to effective prevention of youth homelessness lies in ensuring that the transition from childhood to young adulthood does not happen in an unplanned way, without the proper supports being in place. Attempts to substitute for the safety net offered by family to most young people when they transition to adulthood have sometimes proven difficult to assemble. Sustained efforts to break the association between experience of the care system as a child and, particularly, leaving the care system as a young adult and youth homelessness have met with mixed success¹¹⁰. A key criticism of these systems has been an implicit expectation of full independence in early adulthood, which is not an expectation put on young people who are not leaving care, but a stable family home which offers sustained support as the transition to adulthood over what can be a quite prolonged period. For care leavers, sustained, integrated support systems that reflect the expressed needs and preferences of young people, who are given space and support to shape the services they decide they need for themselves, are generally the most effective form of prevention¹¹¹.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-our-broken-housing-market>

¹⁰⁸ Morton, M.H. et al. (2020) Prevention for youth homelessness: A systematic review of effectiveness studies *Children and Youth Services Review* Sep 1116:105096.

¹⁰⁹ Pleace, N. (2018) *Preventing Homelessness: A Review of the International Evidence* Cork: Simon Communities of Ireland.

¹¹⁰ Cameron, C. et al. (2018) Care leavers in early adulthood: How do they fare in Britain, Finland and Germany? *Children and Youth Services Review* 2018 Apr 1(87), pp. 163-72.

¹¹¹ Dixon, J. and Baker, C. (2012) The housing experiences of young people leaving care in England: What helps? *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 32, pp.26-34; Dixon, J. and Stein, M. (2005) *Leaving care: Throughcare and aftercare in Scotland* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

3.34 Family mediation designed to stop relationship breakdowns that have or are likely to result in youth homelessness are an important form of homelessness prevention for young people. The usual emphasis in homelessness prevention is on preventing eviction, but for young people at risk of homelessness, the transition during which they are often at greatest risk of homelessness is when they leave home and begin the transition to adulthood. Family mediation services, where appropriate (i.e. there is no risk of abuse or violence in the family home) are designed to ensure that a young person who is at risk of leaving home too early, or who has already left in an unplanned way, is able to keep living at home until they are ready to leave. The goal here is not to stop the transition into adulthood, but to ensure it only happens when a young person is ready and in a planned way, so that the right supports are in place, minimising the risk that homelessness will occur. However, the evidence base on these services is not very strong¹¹², even though this approach has been used for some time¹¹³

3.35 More generally, there is evidence that what in Finland is termed a ‘housing social work’ approach to prevention, that can be tailored to the specific needs and expressed wishes of a young person, or indeed any person, at risk of homelessness is the most effective model¹¹⁴. These systems follow a triage model, providing flexible, scalable support, that adapts to what a young person says they want and need. In this model there is no standard practice, a worker might explore family mediation, ensure that the correct supports for a care leaver, or someone leaving another institution are in place or arrange rapid rehousing if it looks like an existing living arrangement is likely to break down. Within this wider model, the simple provision of easily accessible advice and information on housing rights, welfare benefit entitlements, homelessness and preventative services plays a crucial role.

3.36 The main limitation on homelessness prevention systems for young people lies in the availability of affordable, adequate housing supply. As noted, context is important, one cannot solve the homelessness of a 20-year-old if a private or social landlord will not allow them to sign a tenancy agreement, nor can a young person at risk of homelessness be expected to avoid homelessness if, again because of their age, they cannot claim a level of welfare benefit that enables an independent existence by ensuring they have enough to meet housing and other living costs. Experience from England and Finland has suggested that prevention can be effective up to a point, both for young people and homeless people in general, but that it ultimately cannot compensate for a basic shortage of affordable housing supply. Equally, rapid rehousing systems, including local lettings agencies (sometimes called social lettings agencies)¹¹⁵ while they can be a route to stable housing for young people at risk of homelessness, run into the same problem if there is not enough affordable, adequate housing available¹¹⁶.

¹¹² Morton, M.H. *et al.* (2020) *op. cit.*

¹¹³ Quilgars, D *et al.* (2005) *Safe Moves: Piloting prevention services for young people at risk of homelessness Housing, Care and Support*, 8(1), p.4-9.

¹¹⁴ Pleace, N. (2018) *op. cit.*

¹¹⁵ https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/236935/local_lettings_agency_guide.pdf

¹¹⁶ Pleace, N. (2018) *op. cit.*

Reducing youth homelessness

3.37 Youth homelessness has long been seen as representing a state of socioeconomic disadvantage *and* housing exclusion, with an emphasis being placed on addressing both sets of issues. Alongside ensuring housing stability, services have often been designed to also move young people away from a position in which their homelessness is being experienced alongside a situation of not being in education, training or employment. In the 1990s, the concept of foyers was imported, in a somewhat diluted and then altered form, from France¹¹⁷. A foyer offers a combination of training, education, support with job seeking and supported housing designed to provide a transition into a settled home, the idea being that a young person who has experienced homelessness, or is at risk of doing so, will be equipped to find and sustain work, as well as housing, because their support needs around maintaining an independent home, getting a job and any treatment or social care needs will be addressed via their stay in a foyer¹¹⁸. While there is evidence of successes, criticisms of this model can include the limitations of a supply-side intervention in highly depressed labour markets, i.e. training a workforce does not, in itself, necessarily create a sufficient number, range or quality of jobs, because labour markets are shaped by macroeconomic policy and global trade, not by levels of training.

3.38 There are the wider concerns about the efficacy of fixed site, congregate models of supported housing for young people experiencing homelessness and other groups of homeless people. While it is *inaccurate* to suggest that these services do not have successes, there are concerns that some young people run away from supported housing that expects behavioural changes, or that young people become 'stuck' for prolonged periods in what is supposed to be temporary supported accommodation, sometimes because of aspects of service design and sometimes because move on housing is difficult to secure and sometimes because of both issues¹¹⁹.

3.39 Experiments have begun with Housing First for youth¹²⁰. Housing First offers a relatively intensive service, *immediately* housing a young person in their own social or private rented home, offering practical and emotional support and, as case managers, support workers orchestrating the range of educational, training and job seeking services, health, addiction and mental health services (where required) and ensuring that a young person has the supports they need to live in their own home on a sustained basis. There are early indications of success with this model in the UK¹²¹ and in Canada, where it is referred to as HF4Y (Housing First for youth)¹²².

3.40 Housing First is a co-productive (consumer-led) model that emphasises choice and control for the people using it, including operation within a harm reduction framework, i.e. there is no requirement to stop using drugs and alcohol, or engage with psychiatric services, to begin to use the service, nor is the offer or retention of housing via a Housing First conditional on behavioural change. This is in contrast to a model like a foyer service, which requires and expects behavioural change in

¹¹⁷ Anderson, I and Quilgars, D. (1995) *Foyers for Young People: Evaluation of a Pilot Initiative* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹¹⁸ <https://www.foyer.net/foyers>

¹¹⁹ Alton, A.M. *et al.* (2010) Effective interventions for homeless youth: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 38(6), pp.637-645.

¹²⁰ Holtschneider, C. (2016) A part of something: The importance of transitional living programs within a Housing First framework for youth experiencing homelessness. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 65, pp.204-215.

¹²¹ Blood, I. *et al* (2020) *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report* Rock Trust and Housing First Europe Hub

<https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Rock%20Trust%20HF4Y%20Evaluation%202020.pdf>

¹²² <https://www.homelesshub.ca/HF4Y>

young people, and in Housing First is referred to as the ‘separation’ of housing and support. However, Housing First is not a passive model, it follows a recovery orientation, which means that it is designed to raise and promote the idea that positive change is possible, but allowing this to be pursued in a way and at a pace that the service user, in HF4Y services a young person, determines for themselves.

3.41 The Housing First model, which has been piloted in Belfast¹²³, is commonly described as having the following core characteristics¹²⁴:

- Housing is a Human Right
- Choice and Control for Service Users
- Separation of Housing and Treatment
- Recovery Orientation
- Harm Reduction
- Active Engagement without Coercion
- Person-Centred Planning
- Flexible Support for as long as is required

3.42 HF4Y follows the same approach, with a somewhat greater emphasis on economic and social integration, although this is a core element within the mainstream Housing First model. The UK example of a HF4Y service also employed a trauma informed care model to support young people who had often experienced abusive and very difficult childhoods¹²⁵.

3.43 Evidence on Housing First in general is very strong, suggesting that it provides an effective route out of homelessness for people with high and complex needs for the majority of people who use these services. However, evidence on the effectiveness of Housing First in relation to social and economic integration and health and wellbeing is less well developed. While there are positive results, a lack of evidence on specific impacts of Housing First services on health, wellbeing and socioeconomic integration have started to raise questions¹²⁶, a potentially important issue when considering adaptation of the model for young people at risk of homelessness, where social integration is a high priority. The evidence base on HF4Y needs further development, but this is a reflection of these services still being very new and not yet in widespread use.

3.44 All forms of Housing First are designed for homeless people with high and complex needs, often associated with recurrent or sustained experience of homelessness, with some services being designed primarily for homeless people with a psychiatric diagnosis. Other forms of mobile support service, including services for young people, that offer a less intensive service, are increasingly referred to as ‘housing-led’, because like Housing First they do not involve a stay in a foyer, transitional housing or hostel, but instead place a young homeless person directly in their own tenancy. In the UK, case management support offered by tenancy sustainment/floating support homelessness services and by mobile resettlement teams, to formerly homeless people placed directly in ordinary housing, has been used since the 1990s. These services originated in attempts to address tenancy failures among

¹²³ Boyle, F. and Palmer, J. (2016) *The efficiency and effectiveness of the Housing First support service piloted by Depaul Ireland in Belfast: An SROI evaluation*, North Harbour Consulting Limited for the NI Housing Executive.

¹²⁴ <https://housingfirsteurope.eu/guide/>

¹²⁵ Blood, I. et al (2020) op. cit.

¹²⁶ Aubry, T. et al. (2020) Effectiveness of permanent supportive housing and income assistance interventions for homeless individuals in high-income countries: a systematic review. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(6), pp. e342-e360.

statutorily homeless lone adults who were housed (at that time in social housing) under the homelessness legislation, who were often 'vulnerable' under the terms of the laws and associated guidance, and because of support and treatment needs, required additional help to maintain the tenancy offered to them under the homelessness laws, which, in effect, was a 'housing only' response to their homelessness. Young people were among those supported by these early experiments¹²⁷. Evidence on these services has not been collected or explored in a systematic way, but there are a number of small, often charitably funded studies that suggest they can be effective, chiefly in the ways in which Housing First can be effective, providing stability through a flexible, user-led approach to support¹²⁸.

¹²⁷ Pleace, N. (1995) *Housing Single Vulnerable Homeless People* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

¹²⁸ Quilgars, D. *et al.* (2008) *op. cit.*; Quilgars, D. (2010) *op. cit.*

SECTION 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS – INCIDENCE AND NATURE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Introduction

4.1 This section looks at the incidence and nature of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland, covering part of Objective 1 of this study – analyse trends, causes and the nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16 - 25 in Northern Ireland. For ease of reference the groups being examined are as follows:

Group 1: Young people who have been looked after on or after their 16th birthday and have been looked after for a period (not consecutive) of at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday (who then meet the criteria for leaving and aftercare support under the legislation), and who then become homeless at some later point;

Group 2: Young people aged 16 or 17 years old, who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system, but who present as homeless;

Group 3: Young people aged 18 – 25 years old, who present as homeless.

This secondary data has also partially been reported in another Housing Executive research report – *Homelessness Service User Journeys* (forthcoming Spring 2021)¹²⁹.

Background Data on children in Northern Ireland

4.2 In the year ending mid-2020, the number of children (aged 0 – 15 years) in Northern Ireland was 395,800; this accounted for just over one in five (20.9% of the population)¹³⁰. Including young people up to and including the age of 18, the total number is 463,444¹³¹.

4.3 Given the linkages between being in care and youth homelessness, this sub-section now outlines some background information and data on the level and nature of children within the care of Social Services. These figures are relevant in relation to young people in Group 1 as outlined earlier.

At 31 March 2020, 22,414 children were known to Social Services as a child in need. Furthermore, 2,298 were on the Child Protection Register and 3,383 were children in the care of the HSC Trusts (a looked after child)¹³². This latter figure represented a 3% increase in the number of children in care and was the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995¹³³. 21% of the children in care had been looked after for less than a year, with 51% for less than three years. In terms of placements, almost four fifths of the children in care were in foster care

¹²⁹ *Homelessness Service User Journeys – A Report for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive*, Fiona Boyle Associates, Published July 2021.

¹³⁰ NISRA Statistical Bulletin, June 2021, *2020 Mid-year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland*.

¹³¹ [2020 Mid-Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/2020-Mid-Year-Population-Estimates-for-Northern-Ireland) Table on All Areas – Population by sex and single year of age.

¹³² *Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2019/20*, Information and Analysis Directorate, Department of Health and NISRA, January 2021. [Children's Social Care Statistics Northern Ireland \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/childrens-social-care-statistics-northern-ireland)

¹³³ The number of looked after children in Northern Ireland has risen by 30% in the last ten years and by 46% since 1999 when the lowest number of looked after children was recorded under the 1995 Children Order legislation.

placements (79%), 10% were placed with parents, 6% in residential care¹³⁴ and 5% in other placements¹³⁵.

4.4 Of those children looked after at 31 March 2020, a slightly higher proportion were male than female (54% and 46% respectively). This differed to the general children’s population in Northern Ireland which has a more even gender split (51% male and 49% female)¹³⁶. In addition, children in care had an older age profile compared with the general child population; 42% of the looked after population were aged 12 years and over compared to 31% of the general child population.

4.5 During the year ending 31 March 2020, there were 746 discharges from care in Northern Ireland, this was an increase of 10% on the previous year. In 2019/20, 12% of discharges from care were due to adoption whereas half (50%) of children discharged returned to live with their parents, a further 13% went on to live with other family members and 5% to live independently. Some 9% were living with their former foster carers via the ‘Going the Extra Mile’ (GEM) Scheme. 11% went to other accommodation; this included Bed & Breakfast, Hostels, Supported Board & Lodgings, Prison, Hospital etc. Whilst the distribution of destinations for those being care will vary year on year (and varies by age/circumstances of child), there is some indication of young people moving to live independently or in other types of accommodation.

Health & Social Care Trusts - Data

4.6 There are a number of sources of secondary data on the number of young people presenting as homeless. The first from the Health & Social Care Board (provided by the HSC Trusts) relates to Group 2 young people as outlined at paragraph 2.16 and above (young people aged 16 – 17 years old with no current Social Services involvement). This covers all young people covered by the joint arrangements and protocol¹³⁷ between the NI Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts. Tables 6 and 7 outline data for this over the last five years.

Table 6: Annual number of young people (aged 16 and 17) recorded by Health & Social Care Trusts, NI wide, 2016 - 2021, presenting as homeless

Health & Social Care Trusts – NI wide data	Number of young people presenting as homeless				
	April 2016 – March 2017	April 2017 – March 2018	April 2018 – March 2019	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021
Males aged 16 years	27	13	19	15	15
Males aged 17 years	54	41	36	41	26
Females aged 16 years	23	16	22	12	17
Females aged 17 years	56	57	46	34	28
Total	160	127	123	102	86

Source: HSC Board

¹³⁴ At 30th June 2020 there were 48 Children’s Residential Homes in Northern Ireland, 42 were statutory and six were independent. A total of 296 places were available in children’s homes.

¹³⁵ Other placements includes independent living; this refers to any young person being looked after by an authority, who moves from his or her placement to live independently within the community before he/she is 18 years of age.

¹³⁶ 2019 Mid-Year Population Estimate (NISRA 2020).

¹³⁷ Meeting the Accommodation and Support Needs of 16 – 21-year-olds: Regional Good Practice Guidance agreed by the NI Housing Executive and the Health & Social Care Trusts. December 2014, Revised Version.

Table 7: Annual number of young people (aged 16 and 17) presenting as homeless, by Health & Social Care Trust area, 2016 - 2021

Health & Social Care Trusts – NI wide data	Number of young people presenting				
	April 2016 – March 2017	April 2017 – March 2018	April 2018 – March 2019	April 2019 – March 2020	April 2020 – March 2021
Belfast HSC Trust	40	21	18	24	15
Northern HSC Trust	31	22	32	17	11
Southern HSC Trust	30	35	23	23	25
South Eastern HSC Trust	28	23	16	22	23
Western HSC Trust	31	26	34	16	12
Total	160	127	123	102	86

Source: HSC Board

4.7 This data (from tables 6 and 7) shows a significant reduction in the number of young people aged 16 and 17 presenting as homeless, and being recorded as such by the Health & Social Care Trusts, over the period 2016 to 2021, from 160 in 2016/17 to 86 in 2020/21. The level of decrease appears to be consistent across gender/age splits; the number of male presenters decreased from 81 in 2016/17 to 41 in 2020/21, with a similar rate of decline for females over the same period, from 79 to 45. Table 7 indicates a significant decline in numbers of young presenters in three HSC Trust areas namely Belfast, Northern and Western HSCT areas, with numbers remaining relatively consistent over the 5-year period in the Southern and South Eastern HSC Trust areas. In addition, the reduction in the number of young people presenting as homeless (aged 16 and 17) should be set against the backdrop of increasing numbers of children and young people coming into care (see paragraph 4.3).

Analysis of the data for 2019 - 2020¹³⁸ provides the following important findings:

- the majority of young people were living with parents or family (63%) prior to the point when they became homeless. A further 25% were living with friends and family;
- the majority of presenters were currently or previously known to the HSC Trust (72%), although 23% were not previously known to the Trust.

4.8 A range of outcomes were recorded by the HSC Board in 2019 - 2020 in relation to the 102 young people who presented. 29 young people were deemed to be a child in need under the Children (NI) Order¹³⁹ and placed in temporary accommodation including Young People's Supported accommodation projects, B&B, NI Housing Executive temporary accommodation, supported lodgings or hotel. It should be acknowledged that whilst a young person may initially be placed in accommodation types such as B&Bs or a hotel, they may then move to a care placement. 57 young people returned home. In 2020/21 similar outcomes were recorded with 18 young people categorised as LAC and 66 young people returning home.

¹³⁸ The most recent year for which this analysis is available.

¹³⁹ Article 21, Children (NI) Order 1995 – provides for local authorities to provide accommodation for 16 – 17-year-olds in need, where there is no other accommodation available.

NI Housing Executive - Data

4.9 The second source of secondary data is the NI Housing Executive¹⁴⁰. Tables 8 and 9 indicate the number of young single people¹⁴¹ presenting and being accepted as homeless over the last five years. This is broken down by age and by gender. This data covers young people from all three groups. Firstly, young people currently in Groups 1 or 2 who present to the Housing Executive and secondly, Group 3, that is young people who become homeless between the ages of 18 and 25 years old. In addition, it may also include young people who were previously categorised as Groups 1 or 2 – that is young people who have been care experienced (prior to age 16) and young people who have been assessed and categorised as a child in need under the legislation when they are aged 16 or 17, but are now in the age group for Group 3. The nature of the data does not enable any analysis by whether the young person was previously in care or a care leaver, although information is collected on an individual basis in the Housing Solutions form, including whether a person was previously in care. In addition, table 10 provides some insight into the connection with the care system through reason for homelessness – previous child in care, although this is not available for the full five years under examination¹⁴².

4.10 In addition, it is worth noting that age-related information is gathered throughout the Housing Solutions process and recorded on the Housing Solutions form, which enables the Housing Executive to identify that they are dealing with an applicant who falls into the category of youth homelessness. Young people are identified at the point of application, primarily through recording Date of Birth (page 1 – Housing Solutions Form) and also via recording of the household group on page 1 of the Housing Solutions Form¹⁴³. This records age categories with 16 – 17 and 18 – 25 years old as distinct groups. Pages 1 and 16 of the Housing Solutions Form also records if the applicant has been a child in care and page 6 of the Housing Solutions form records additional information about the age of the applicant, and references duties under the Children (NI) Order 1995. On page 16 (Final Decision details) – there is space to record a young person as being in priority need as a result of their vulnerability as a young person. It should be noted that this information is qualitative in nature and not available as a data set for analysis.

4.11 Tables 8 and 9 indicate the level of young people presenting to the Housing Executive and who are accepted as homeless over the last five years, split into household type by gender and age categories. This indicates a reduction in the total number of young single presenters (aged 16 – 25 years) to the Housing Executive over the last five years, from a total of 3,195 in 2016/17 to 2,876 in 2020/21. There was a reduction in presenters across all categories of age and gender. The proportion of young presenters in comparison to all presenters (of any age group) stayed at a similar level, accounting for 17.2% in 2016/17 with a slight increase to 17.98% in 2020/21, over the five years, albeit that this was variable over the 5-year period. Overall the data suggests a decline in the number of young people presenting as homeless, but indicates that the proportionate level when compared against all presenters has remained relatively static.

¹⁴⁰ The broad age of 16 – 25 years (and the various sub-categories) noted above does not include children (or young people) within this age bracket that are part of a family presenting as homeless either as dependent children (18 and under) or as dependent adults (within the age bracket).

¹⁴¹ It should be noted that the data sets examined related to single young people aged 16 – 17 years and 18 – 25 years old. The data examined does not include situations where two adults or husband/wife live together (aged 16 – 17 or 18 – 25 years).

¹⁴² Reason for homelessness – ex child in care – is available for 2016 -17 and 2017 – 18.

¹⁴³ For example, a household group may comprise two young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years.

Table 9 highlights that the total number of FDA acceptances for single young people aged 16 – 25 years declined over the 5-year period from 1,620 in 2016/17 to 1,428 in 2020/21. Similar to presenters the proportionate level of FDA acceptances amongst young people showed a slight decline over the five years; from 50.7% awarded FDA status in 2016/17 to 49.6% in 2020/21, although again there was considerable variation within the 5-year period with a peak of 56.74% acceptance rate in 2019/20.

4.12 On closer inspection the following should be noted:

- The number of young single males presenting appears to have decreased more rapidly than females and other age groups. This may be because young males may perceive that there is little point in applying as they will not be awarded FDA status, hence the lower number of applications;
- There is quite a significant differential between the total number of young people applying as homeless and the number accepted as having FDA status. This is because young people do not generally fall into the category of priority need; unless there are other factors involved, for example a young person that is at risk specifically of sexual or financial exploitation;
- The decline in applications from and acceptances of single males and females aged 16 – 17 years may in part be attributed to improved working between the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts, in particular working within the UNOCINI guidance.

4.13 Table 10 then presents the number of young applicants (aged 16 – 25 years) by reason for homelessness and, in comparison to total applicants. The data shows that several of the reasons for homelessness are consistently and disproportionately higher amongst young presenters (over the 5-year period). These are the young person was previously in care, breakdown of sharing or family dispute, intimidation, no accommodation in Northern Ireland and release from institution. In contrast, there is no or a very low incidence of young people for a number of other reasons for homelessness; these are fire, flood and other emergency, bomb/fire damage, loss of private rented sector accommodation, mortgage arrears and relationship breakdown.

4.14 Table 11 outlines the levels of young homeless applicants by Council area. The data indicates an increase in the incidence of young presenters, in comparison to total presenters in a number of Council areas with Derry & Strabane (21.93%) and Fermanagh & Omagh (20.85%) showing the highest incidence in 2020/21.

Table 8: Number of young presenters, by gender and as proportion of total applicants - 2016 – 2021

Category of young person – household type	2016 - 2017		2017 – 2018		2018 – 2019		2019 - 2020		2020 - 2021	
	Nr of presenters	%age of total presenters	Nr of presenters	%age of total presenters	Nr of presenters	%age of total presenters	Nr of presenters	%age of total presenters	Nr of presenters	%age of total presenters
Single female – Aged 16 – 17 years	122	0.66%	106	0.58%	89	0.49%	90	0.54%	84	0.53%
Single female – Aged 18 – 25 years	1,365	7.35%	1,274	7.01%	1,252	6.88%	1,195	7.11%	1,285	8.03%
Single male – Aged 16 – 17 years	102	0.55%	69	0.38%	66	0.36%	68	0.4%	50	0.31%
Single male – Aged 18 – 25 years	1,606	8.65%	1,552	8.54%	1,429	7.85%	1,322	7.87%	1,457	9.11%
All young presenters (aged 16 – 25 years)	3,195	17.20%	3,001	16.51%	2,836	15.58%	2,675	15.92%	2,876	17.98%
Total presenters in year	18,573	100%	18,180	100%	18,202	100%	16,802	100%	15,991	100%

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit

Note: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding and also because all categories are not included in this table.

Table 9: Number of FDA acceptances, by household type - age, gender and as proportion of total acceptances and compared to presentations 2016 – 2021

Category of young person – household type	2016 - 2017		2017 - 2018		2018 - 2019		2019 - 2020		2020 - 2021	
	Nr of acceptances	%age of total acceptances	Nr of acceptances	%age of total acceptances	Nr of acceptances	%age of total acceptances	Nr of acceptances	%age of total acceptances	Nr of acceptances	%age of total acceptances
Single female – Aged 16 – 17 years	74	0.68%	56	0.47%	53	0.42%	44	0.39%	36	0.36%
Single female – Aged 18 – 25 years	816	7.5%	799	6.73%	828	6.62%	776	6.85%	781	7.89%
Single male – Aged 16 – 17 years	52	0.48%	31	0.26%	33	0.26%	32	0.28%	17	0.17%
Single male – Aged 18 – 25 years	678	6.23%	681	5.73%	655	5.23%	666	5.88%	594	6.01%
All young acceptances (aged 16 – 25 years)	1,620	14.89%	1,567	13.19%	1,569	12.54%	1,518	13.41%	1,428	14.44%
All young presenters (aged 16 – 25 years)	3,195	-	3,001	-	2,836	-	2,675	-	2,876	-
Percentage acceptance rate by presenters	50.7%	-	52.21%	-	55.32%	-	56.74%	-	49.6%	-
Total acceptances in year	10,883	100%	11,877	100%	12,512	100%	11,323	100%	9,889	100%

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit

Note: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding and also because all categories are not included in this table.

Table 10: Number of young presenters (singles aged 16 – 17 and 18 – 25 years) by reason for homelessness - 2016 - 2021

Reason for homelessness	2016 - 2017		2017 – 2018		2018 – 2019		2019 - 2020		2020 - 2021	
	Nr of young presenters	%age of total with that reason	Nr of young presenters	%age of total with that reason	Nr of young presenters	%age of total with that reason	Nr of young presenters	%age of total with that reason	Nr of young presenters	%age of total with that reason
ANR¹⁴⁴	114	2.76%	117	2.78%	152	3.31%	152	3.58%	145	4.05%
Bomb/Fire damage	5	9.61%	3	6.82%	3	6.82%	2	4.35%	5	9.43%
Breakdown sharing/family dispute	1,589	39.91%	1,468	39.21%	1,571	40.38%	1,477	40.46%	1,727	41.45%
Child ex care	82	94.25%	73	100%	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Domestic violence	104	13.7%	93	11.48%	146	12.44%	142	12.38%	168	14.32%
Fire, flood, other emergency	4	5.48%	10	7.57%	3	5.55%	2	4.54%	3	4.76%
Release from institution¹⁴⁵	70	19.89%	73	22.05%	119	35.10%	144	39.89%	125	34.15%
Intimidation¹⁴⁶	123	18.72%	98	17.65%	106	22.04%	57	17.01%	56	19.58%
Loss of HE accommodation¹⁴⁷	9	10.84%	29	27.1%	29	12.55%	23	10.69%	24	14.2%
Loss of PRS accommodation¹⁴⁸	183	7.06%	156	6.06%	151	5.93%	116	5.49%	88	7.7%
Mortgage arrears	1	0.53%	1	0.55%	0	-	2	2.25%	0	-
Neighbourhood harassment	160	10.47%	187	12.52%	178	12.29%	185	13.07%	184	11.23%
No accommodation in NI	261	18.43%	199	14.17%	230	18.47%	229	17.56%	166	16.40%
Relationship breakdown	115	6.6%	135	7.6%	120	6.65%	131	7.78%	157	8.96%
Sexual abuse/violence	20	18.18%	18	16.82%	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
Other¹⁴⁹	355	43.24%	341	52.62%	28	12.02%	13	8.02%	21	16.15%
Total young presenters per year	3,195	-	3,001	-	2,836	-	2,675	-	2,876	-
Total presenters per year	18,573	-	18,180	-	18,202	-	16,802	-	15,991	-

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit Note: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding and also because all categories are not included in this table. NR stands for Not Recorded.

¹⁴⁴ ANR – Accommodation Not Reasonable – from 2018/19 broken down into seven categories – financial hardship, mental health, overcrowding, physical health/disability, property unfitness, violence and other.

¹⁴⁵ From 2018/19 this group included hospital, prison and other institution discharge. Prior to this – these were separate groups.

¹⁴⁶ Intimidation covers 5 categories – anti-social behaviour, paramilitary, racial, sectarian and sexual orientation. In 2017/18 this category also included intimidation – disability.

¹⁴⁷ Loss of NIHE accommodation – from 2018/19 further breakdowns by HE and Housing Association accommodation – covering arrears, anti-social behaviour and other.

¹⁴⁸ Loss of PRS accommodation – from 2018/19 further breakdowns covering affordability, fitness/repairs, landlord dispute, property sale and other.

¹⁴⁹ Other covers 3 categories – no data, other action and unknown.

Table 11: Number of young presenters (singles aged 16- 17 and 18 – 25 years) by Council area - 2015 - 2020

Council Area	2016 - 2017		2017 – 2018		2018 – 2019		2019 - 2020		2020 - 2021	
	Nr of young presenters	%age of total presenters in Council area	Nr of young presenters	%age of total presenters in Council area	Nr of young presenters	%age of total presenters in Council area	Nr of young presenters	%age of total presenters in Council area	Nr of young presenters	%age of total presenters in Council area
Antrim & Newtownabbey	237	16.95%	198	16.11%	206	15.42%	195	16.24%	258	19.07%
Ards & North Down	250	16.86%	272	16.4%	231	14.76%	184	14.42%	219	17.16%
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	196	15.53%	156	15.51%	161	12.85%	146	13.28%	195	17.05%
Belfast	1,045	18.36%	1,241	17.23%	934	16.25%	860	16.32%	783	17.12%
Causeway Coast & Glens	149	14.19%	153	15.27%	147	14.68%	141	14.86%	157	17.74%
Derry City & Strabane	347	17.92%	238	17.72%	375	18.04%	407	20.41%	457	21.93%
Fermanagh & Omagh	148	19.63%	63	15.37%	87	12.95%	127	18.98%	127	20.85%
Lisburn & Castlereagh	266	18.93%	196	18.76%	134	14.16%	158	15.28%	138	16.33%
Mid & East Antrim	258	16.55%	225	15.98%	253	16.69%	209	14.65%	184	14.18%
Mid Ulster	118	14.23%	85	11.45%	120	14.23%	95	14.2%	114	17.3%
Newry, Mourne & Down	183	15.17%	174	15.33%	188	15.11%	153	12.6%	244	19.29%
Total young presenters per year	3,195	-	3,001	-	2,836	-	2,675	-	2,876	-
Total presenters per year	18,573	-	18,180	-	18,202	-	16,802	-	15,991	-

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit

Note: Percentages may not add to totals due to rounding and also because all categories are not included in this table.

4.15 As outlined earlier in Section 2 the Housing Executive has a duty to provide temporary accommodation in a number of circumstances¹⁵⁰. Tables 12 and 13 provide data on the number of young people placed in temporary accommodation by accommodation type, and young people's average length of stay in temporary accommodation over the 5-year period. Table 12 indicates an upward trend in terms of the total number of placements of young people per year in temporary accommodation, with particular increases in the use of external and voluntary sector hostels and to a lesser extent, private single lets. The final year recorded (2020 – 2021) shows a significant increase in overall placements, due directly to accommodation requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic. In contrast the average length of time young people are in a temporary accommodation placement has been steadily decreasing in each of the three Housing Executive Regions since 2016 – 2017, with an accelerated decrease during 2020 – 2021.¹⁵¹ The Housing Executive noted: *that while demand has increased significantly, in some cases capacity within hostels has reduced to accommodate social distancing and/or self-isolation and the Housing Executive has sought to mitigate this reduction through the provision of a range of alternative measures such as the use of additional single lets, block booking arrangements for non-standard accommodation and the use of vacant Housing Executive properties for temporary accommodation. The requirement for temporary accommodation also increased as Covid-19 restrictions and household bubbles meant that there were fewer alternatives available to people who may have chosen to stay with families or friends pre-pandemic and therefore they had to avail of the temporary accommodation options provided by the Housing Executive. A significant number of those households requiring temporary accommodation had previously been accepted as statutorily homeless*¹⁵².

¹⁵⁰ Temporary accommodation is provided under Article 8 of the 1988 Housing (NI) Order "The interim duty to accommodate "pending investigation where the customer has a potential priority need. Once the decision is reached and the customer has been accepted as a Full Duty Applicant then he is owed a duty under Article 10 of the 1988 Order. The stay in temporary accommodation will continue as part of the HE's phased discharge of duty until the customer is re-housed.

¹⁵¹ The data used in this report to capture length of stay in temporary accommodation is a measurement of average length of stay by placement, rather than cumulative stay (i.e. across multiple placements). Length of stay is a factor that can be measured in different ways, and those different ways of measuring may illustrate different trends.

¹⁵² Information provided by Housing Executive, Homelessness Policy & Strategy Unit.

Table 12: Number of young people placed in temporary accommodation by accommodation type - 2016 – 2021

Accommodation type	2016 - 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 - 2021
Bespoke facility of temporary accommodation	0	0	0	0	19
Crash: Voluntary sector	0	0	0	0	38
External	49	152	265	465	1,705
Leased property	89	64	70	67	175
NIHE hostels	44	28	39	25	89
Private single lets	165	164	121	174	346
Voluntary sector hostels	156	177	197	250	419
Total placements in year	503	585	692	981	2,791

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit

Table 13: Young people’s average length of stay in temporary accommodation (total average days) - 2016 – 2021¹⁵³

Region	2016 - 2017	2017 – 2018	2018 – 2019	2019 – 2020	2020 - 2021
Belfast	232	240	211	191	55
North	195	132	129	112	62
South	201	186	158	148	79

Source: NIHE Data Analytics Unit

4.16 The Housing Executive provided further information¹⁵⁴:

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on homelessness across Northern Ireland with the impact expected to last well beyond the easing of restrictions. Key impacts have included:

The reduction of presentations by around 5% in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20;

- *Breakdown of sharing overtook accommodation not reasonable as the top reason for homelessness;*
- *Temporary accommodation demand increased dramatically (placements increased by 115%), particularly among single households;*
- *Throughput from temporary accommodation has been reduced due to fewer social housing allocations during the pandemic;*
- *Supported housing capacity reduced to allow for Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance around social distancing and self-isolation;*

¹⁵³ This data analysis includes young people in the 16 – 25-year-old age group who are part of couples/living together.

¹⁵⁴ Information provided by Housing Executive, Homelessness Policy & Strategy Unit.

- *Young people have been particularly impacted, especially in Belfast where the number of placements quadrupled in 2020/21 compared with 2019/20.*
- *The Housing Executive’s response to the challenges presented by Covid-19 is outlined in ‘The Way Home – Homelessness response to COVID-19’ which can be accessed on [this link](#).*

4.17 Supporting People gather data from providers in relation to accommodation based and floating support services for young people. Analysis of this data for the most recent year available (2019/20) indicates a 78% success rate in supporting clients to achieve independent living within accommodation-based services and a 100% success rate within floating support services.¹⁵⁵

4.18 Some people present to the Housing Executive more than once, and analysis of available data¹⁵⁶ on repeat homelessness¹⁵⁷ indicates a slight increase in repeat homelessness, with an increase of 6.9% from 2017/18 – 2018/19 and a 1.3% increase from 2018/19 to 2019/20. It is also important to put this increase of repeat presentations in context against an overall drop of 8% in all presentations. Furthermore, acceptance rates for repeat cases have also increased; in 2016/17 61% of repeat cases were accepted rising to 72% in 2019/20. The Housing Executive report on repeat homelessness pointed to a number of factors contributing to why repeat homelessness may be increasing¹⁵⁸. These included the following, many of which are highlighted later in Sections 5 and 6 on the theme – the nature of youth homelessness:

- Increasing numbers of clients presenting with complex needs
- Extreme difficulties in getting clients access to appropriate medical interventions such as addictions services and mental health services
- The disconnect in many areas between mental health and drug services with dual diagnosis clients being unable to access either
- Behavioural issues brought on by the complex needs leading to an inability to sustain a placement, resulting in clients being unable to access the support that could help them become “tenancy ready”.
- Affordability issues in the private rented sector causing clients to be unable to meet the rent.

The report also noted that singles are significantly the largest group of repeat presentations representing over 60% of all repeat presentations in every year while singles represent circa 50 – 52% of all presentations in an average year.

¹⁵⁵ There isn’t currently one standard definition for ‘independent living’ used by providers who report this data to Supporting People, although work is being done to review this measurement

¹⁵⁶ *Ending homelessness together*, Analysis of Repeat Homelessness in Northern Ireland, NI Housing Executive - Maureen Kerr and Avril Robinson, January 2021.

¹⁵⁷ The Housing Executive defines repeat homelessness as any client with more than one presentation within 365 days. Repeat homelessness data bases used for this report count all repeat presentations. That is, if a client has two presentations within 356 days it will count the most recent one as the “repeat” presentation but the original will not be counted as it is not “repeat”. If a client has 3 presentations it will count two etc.

¹⁵⁸ Based on anecdotal evidence from the front line NIHE staff and via the Homelessness Local Area Groups.

SECTION 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS – FEEDBACK FROM STAKEHOLDERS

Introduction

5.1 This section provides an analysis of the feedback from internal stakeholders (NI Housing Executive) and external stakeholders (including representatives from the five HSC Trusts and other providers in the voluntary and community sector). Details of respondents are provided at Appendix 1. Quotes from respondents are provided throughout in *italics* and are marked as INT (Housing Executive respondents) and EXT (HSC Trust and other provider respondents).

5.2 The analysis of this primary fieldwork has provided key findings around working to both prevent and respond to youth homelessness; these have been organised thematically in line with the research objectives as follows:

Theme	Research objective
Theme 1 – Nature of youth homelessness	Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16 – 25 in Northern Ireland. (Objective 1)
Theme 2 – Preventing youth homelessness	Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people. (Objective 2)
Theme 3 – Challenges in service delivery – accommodation and support	Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing ‘move on’ options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready. (Objective 3)
Theme 4 – Challenges in inter-agency working	Identification and exploration of the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions. (Objective 5)

Whilst this section relates largely to how personnel from a range of stakeholders – Housing Executive, HSC Trusts and voluntary/community sector – respond to the legislation, strategic policy and objectives and how they provide services including preventative work, accommodation and other support, a key focus of the discussions was on how all of this impacts young homeless people and their journey into, through and out of homelessness. This is also covered in the final part of this Section (paragraph 5.23), and is then covered in more detail in Section 6 of this report, drawing on feedback from young people and their personal lived experience of homelessness. In addition, stakeholders and young people provided considerable feedback on current and potential Models of Good Practice and analysis of this is covered in Section 7.

Key Findings 1 - The nature of youth homelessness

5.3 This sub-section examines stakeholder's views on the scope of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland, looking in particular at trends and causes, together with background issues and triggers. In addition, pathways into youth homelessness and the options for pathways out of homelessness are considered, as well as the level of youth homelessness at present and over the last number of years. This sub-section covers the research objective - *Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16 – 25 in Northern Ireland.*

Reasons for youth homelessness

5.4 There was universal agreement across internal and external stakeholders that the main reason for youth homelessness was family difficulties and sharing breakdown. Responses suggested that this stemmed from two main sources; one, that the parent(s) or other adults/people in the sharing arrangement were unable or unwilling to cope with the young person's challenging behaviours which were disrupting the normal family setting and dynamics, and secondly, that there had been some sort of change within the family structure e.g. new step-parent or step-siblings or that the parent's own behaviour meant that the young person was unable to remain in the home e.g. domestic violence or abuse, parent's mental ill health etc.

These broad 'family home' related factors were thought to account for three quarters or more of young people presenting as homeless to the NI Housing Executive for young people in Groups 2 and 3. These reasons also applied to settings which the young person moved to, as noted below under pathways into homelessness – these being with a family member or relative or with a friend.

These two broad reasons can be summed up in the following quotes from interviews:

Young people get to an age where they are drinking and partying and their parents get fed up; they are at the end of their tether. And the young person maybe tries to go and get somewhere of their own. (INT)

Some families don't avail of services, they muster on, but then when the child reaches 16 or 17, they are presenting significant challenges. There is a lack of adherence to rules and boundaries, the parents are struggling and the young person won't engage. (EXT)

Changes in family structures and circumstances were noted as a particular trigger or causal factor in youth homelessness. One respondent stated: *Nowadays with blended families you see young people who don't fit in to this new family and inevitably slowly and surely find themselves excluded – they turn to whatever, substances – becoming the victim of exploitation – going where somebody needs them or wants them. (INT)* This theme was reiterated by an external respondent: *Reconstituted families, where the child feels they are rejected by the new partners. (EXT)*

Whilst there was a sense from some respondents that the reason emanated from the young person, there was also recognition of this latter factor that parental behaviour and underlying circumstances resulted in a home that was disrupted and unsettled, leading the young person to leave. Poor family skills and parenting were mentioned as well as poor interventions with the young person at critical

milestones in their development. Domestic abuse and violence as well as other forms of abuse within the household were also noted.

I've had a handful of more difficult cases where the young person was effectively made homeless on their 18th birthday – Mum was very volatile, alcohol involved and physical violence and difficulties – the young person was in a volatile home and with parents who have a volatile lifestyle. (INT)

There are underlying factors – history in the family, homelessness before – dysfunctional family, single parents struggling. (INT)

When the child reaches mid-adolescence they can be using together alongside the parent. It's easy to put blame on the young person but Mum and boyfriend have been taking and sharing drugs with that young person. (EXT)

For young people in Group 1, who were care experienced, the reasons for youth homelessness centred more around a combination of the reason why they were in care in the first instance (including past trauma and family life) as well as factors relating to their leaving care experience, and their capacity for independent living. One external stakeholder put it like this: *For these young people, they were coming from a situation of childhood adversity leading to them going into care, whether that was neglect, a dysfunctional family or a high level of chaos – and from that they don't have a positive social or family support network or system in their lives. (EXT)*

Feedback also suggested other relevant factors for young people in Group 1, including late entry into the care system (ages 13 – 16 years) and/or a care history characterised by multiple placements. One external stakeholder noted that this effectively resulted in a *very short window to support them*. All of this is covered in more detail under the sub-section on preventing youth homelessness (paragraphs 5.7 – 5.12). This looks at the wide range of factors relating to why the young person's journey out of care has been unsuccessful in terms of obtaining and sustaining independent accommodation, and ultimately why they have become homeless at some point in their post-care experience.

This was summed up by one respondent in the discussion about reasons for homelessness. *People leaving care and in particular leaving children's homes. They come out and are set up to fail...because they have been living in a structured environment, then next thing they are out and don't get enough support in the community. They don't get enough training – in terms of cooking, basic money management – there is not enough done. (INT)* An external stakeholder concurred with this viewpoint and referenced this to young people making the transition from residential children's homes, as well as those in foster placements. *Recently we have found that more young people are becoming homeless because of breakdown of foster placements...in some cases this is when the money runs out, they don't want them anymore. (EXT)*

A wide range of other factors were noted as background reasons or contributory factors to youth homelessness for all three groups of young people – those who were care experienced (Group 1), 16 – 17-year-olds presenters (Group 2) and 18 – 25-year-olds presenters (Group 3). These are summarised in Table 14. The multiplicity and complexity of issues faced by young homeless people

are summed up in these quotes: *The issues are getting more complex – physical and sexual abuse, using alcohol and drugs at a young age, low self-esteem and self-harm.* (INT)

The reasons are still relationship breakdown and sharing – it’s always been the case – it’s still the same reason. But the reasons behind sharing breakdown have changed – it’s much more about an increase in the use of drugs and mental health, and the complexity of cases has increased. (INT)

Table 14: Range of contributory reasons for youth homelessness

Additional reasons for youth homelessness	Discussion and Quotes
Alcohol and drug misuse	<p>This theme was frequently noted as a contributory factor in a large number of cases. <i>They are addicted to prescription drugs; this might be because of trauma and abuse in their childhood. They turn to self-medication or drink alcohol to forget about it and this leads to depression and anxiety.</i> (INT)</p> <p><i>Ten years ago, it was more around alcohol, and you could deal with it there and then and the young person would sober up. Now it’s drugs – cannabis, legal highs, yellows and blues, diazepam. It’s more difficult. And families put them out because they can’t cope with them, but the problem is where do they go?</i> (EXT)</p>
Mental health	<p>This theme was repeated by most respondents. <i>It’s broken down because of mental health – the young person coming through our doors say mental health – that’s the line that is being used. At times they are not engaging with anyone or support services.</i> (INT)</p> <p><i>Without a doubt we are seeing more and more young people with mental health issues and with dual diagnosis they are falling between two posts.</i> (INT)</p>
Trauma	<p>Reference was made to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) and trauma experienced by young people at an earlier age, as well as transgenerational trauma. The over-arching conclusion under this heading was that if this had not been dealt with at the appropriate time and sufficiently, this trauma would continue to be a negative influence and trigger in the young person’s life, in many situations leading to other factors e.g., alcohol misuse, self-harm, poor mental health etc.</p> <p><i>The trauma can start when they are small, but at that stage the child doesn’t understand it. But it’s bound to come back and they have flashbacks – as they get older it comes back to bite.</i> (EXT)</p>
Poverty and deprivation	<p>There were indicators that changes to the welfare benefits a household was entitled to, particularly as a young person moved from childhood to adulthood e.g., Child Benefit and dependent elements of Universal Credit, had an impact on whether a young person remained (and was able to remain) in the home. Respondents also noted that poverty in itself was a contributor to youth homelessness:</p> <p><i>Mum’s thrown me out because we’ve lost the non-dependence charge for housing costs – this is literally why – it’s not that common but an underlying element – most parents maybe don’t admit it.</i> (INT)</p> <p><i>The main reason is family breakdown, but this stems back to poverty and deprivation in our estates.</i> (INT)</p>

Additional reasons for youth homelessness	Discussion and Quotes
Generational	<p>Linked to the previous factor around poverty and deprivation a number of respondents pointed to an inter-generational culture of poverty, deprivation and trauma leading to homelessness and housing applications at an early age. One respondent noted: <i>There is often a culture of rehousing in the family history – you can certainly see a connection to their parents – people’s homeless connection – this is part of the picture coming through – you get onto the housing list when you are 18 – 20 in order to get your points and get rehoused.</i> (INT)</p> <p>Another respondent said the following: <i>Families and their parents – it’s a cycle – they are repeating what their parents have done, perhaps there is an absent mother or father. Also, alcohol, drugs misuse and mental health, no education and not getting the right care and Adverse Childhood Experiences.</i> (INT)</p>
Lack of engagement	<p>Reference was made to an overall lack of engagement in a range of services, as well as a lack of inclusivity and other options for young people who sit outside mainstream education. <i>There is the lack of engagement in the education system – and absence of the structure and guidelines which goes in full life experience of being in education – so they have a lack of boundaries.</i> (INT)</p> <p><i>Part of the problem is that they have low self-esteem, they are starting from a very low threshold – they need to have belief in self.</i> (INT)</p>
Lack of support networks	<p><i>It’s all about support networks. No-one would be homeless if they had somewhere safe to go and felt secure. There is a lot of historical stuff there and risk. For other young people if they hit a difficult patch they move back home and have parental support – but these young people don’t have that security.</i> (EXT)</p>
Links to learning disability and autistic spectrum	<p>A number of respondents highlighted a high incidence of young people presenting as homeless who have a learning disability (diagnosed and undiagnosed) and/or who are on the autistic spectrum.</p>
Loss of accommodation	<p>This was noted by respondents for young people who had a tenancy which they had lost for a variety of reasons; this included affordability, Notice to Quit because of anti-social and other behaviours, breakdown of sharing etc. This was a reason to a larger degree amongst Group 3, and it was recognised that they may have experience more placement breakdown over a longer period of time.</p>

Additional reasons for youth homelessness	Discussion and Quotes
Sexual orientation	<p>This was not a particularly frequently referenced reason for homelessness; however, a number of respondents said they had noticed increases in this factor.</p> <p><i>Parental intolerance to sexual orientation – this has been raised, we are very aware of this – and in Northern Ireland there seems to be lower levels of tolerance - they come out as gay – and the parents want them to move out. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>Parental intolerance to sexual orientation doesn't seem to be a big issue but we are seeing increasing numbers from the LGBT community amongst the youth homeless. (EXT)</i></p>
Other reasons	<p>Respondents mentioned a number of other contributory factors including intimidation, neighbourhood harassment and interconnections to youth offending including anti-social behaviour and also release from prison. One respondent noted <i>through anti-social behaviour issues in an estate, causing bother – they become known to the police. (INT)</i> Pregnancy was also mentioned as a contributory factor, with acknowledgement that in this case the young person would be seen as vulnerable and in priority need.</p>

Respondents emphasised a number of things about the above factors:

- Firstly, in some cases it meant that the young person was experiencing multiple disadvantages, and this could impact on their inclination and ability to seek out relevant services;
- Secondly, that these presenting factors meant that a simple and straight forward solution was not always possible. For example, the complexity of the lack of family support, together with past trauma meant that certain services and accommodation types would be unsuitable to the young person in question;
- Thirdly, that for Housing Advisors, Social Workers, Personal Advisers and providers working directly with the young homeless person, a broad spectrum and depth of knowledge and expertise is necessary. One Housing Executive respondent talked about the need to ensure that Housing Advisors receive training in mental health, addictions, autism, trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).

This sub-section has looked in detail at the reasons for youth homelessness provided by respondents. It is worth noting that feedback also suggested that there is a small number of young people who present as homeless in order to obtain a quicker route into social housing, as illustrated by the following quote: *We also have a small number of young people saying they are homeless, that they are being put out – they just know the system and want to get on the list. And when we contact the family, I feel they also know what they're saying – we want them to leave the house. (INT)* An external stakeholder made a similar comment: *Anecdotally from managers we would hear that there are some young people trying to play the system. They have supported accommodation through the HSC Trust but they are spending a lot of time at 'home' (what was their family home) – they are doing it to get*

points from the Housing Executive...there is an element of this – I would say it is a very small percentage, probably less than 5%. (EXT)

Pathways into youth homelessness

5.5 Pathways into youth homelessness were noted. There was agreement amongst respondents that one of the most common pathways for young people into homelessness was a delayed engagement with the Housing Executive or other statutory or voluntary providers. In the majority of cases the young person had left (or been asked to leave) their previous accommodation, be that their parental or family home, shared accommodation or some form of temporary or supported accommodation. In many cases the young person had then taken a pathway of living with a family member (frequently another parent, grandparent, Aunt/Uncle, older sibling) and/or had been sofa surfing with a family friend or a friend of their own age group. It was acknowledged that this pathway into youth homelessness was most relevant to young people in Groups 2 and 3, but that young people in Group 1 who were care leavers, could also slip into this pathway if their accommodation or placement broke down at some stage after they had left care. Analysis of responses in relation to the statutory processes relating to the different groups of young people is covered in a later sub-section, *Challenges in service delivery – accommodation and support* (paragraph 5.13).

Housing Executive respondents said that a pathway via some type of sofa surfing was a common occurrence for young people: *You often find they have been sofa surfing for the last three months. It may be a lack of knowledge and understanding of the systems and where to come to. This happens quite a lot. The new application is based on the last settled address¹⁵⁹ – and we have to clarify this – they're all sofa surfing. It is more common – and now we find a lot of people saying that they are sleeping in their cars – especially single young men. (INT)*

We get a lot of cases of young people who don't come to us directly. We pick this up at the triage where we ask – where have you been staying? And usually the answer is – moving about and sofa surfing – no static address. (INT)

It is indicative of youth homelessness that they don't present straight away. They are in some sort of arrangement and this then delays the young person in seeking support, and in particular support from statutory services. (INT)

One Housing Executive respondent suggested that based on their experience around half of the young people who present have been sofa surfing for up to a year before presenting. They noted: *They would rather stay with friends – maybe it's the lack of money or drink and drugs – for them it's just anywhere to put their head down. Maybe they are frightened and worried – they leave it so long. (INT)*

Another Housing Executive respondent said the following about pathways into youth homelessness: *They go through other routes first – when they leave their parents' house they go and stay with Granny or they are sofa surfing with friends – or they go to stay with an older brother or sister – Granny takes*

¹⁵⁹ This refers to a person's last period of settled accommodation, when they were at the one address for a period of time, usually with some level of security of tenure or residence.

the wayward children. It's a delayed response before they come to us. Maybe they think that their parents will let them come home but when that doesn't happen, and they run out of other places to stay – then they come to us at crisis point. We get young people who were not really believing that they were going to be homeless. (INT)

This quote points to another interesting theme in some of the internal and external interviews; namely a lack of understanding on the part of some respondents to the contribution of family dynamic and circumstances, trauma, poverty and deprivation to the young person's homeless pathway. In some cases there is an undertone of 'blame' on the young person, on the part of the respondent.

There are two key points to emphasise from this discussion on pathways into youth homelessness; firstly, that given the length of time they have been out of the family home, making any attempt to reconcile the young person with their parent(s)/family members becomes more difficult and secondly, that by the time they present to the Housing Executive (or are referred through to the HSC Trust if they are aged 16/17), the young person is in crisis and they literally have nowhere else to go. Both these factors make any preventative or mediation approach more difficult at this point. These findings are evidenced by the following quote:

A lot of our young presenters come to us at crisis point. They try other things first of all – they sofa surf, they stay with a friend or a family member before they come to us, but they come at the end when they have no other sharing option. A lot of young people don't understand where the help is – we need to build that awareness. (INT)

Another important factor highlighted by respondents was around rough sleeping and street activity. Feedback suggested that this was not a major element at the outset of young people's pathways into homelessness; that there was a much higher prevalence of sofa surfing and making other temporary arrangements as opposed to sleeping on the streets. There was however an indication that if the young person's pathway moved towards chronic homelessness, with multiple spells of homelessness and placement breakdown in a period of 12 months, that these young people were more likely to gravitate towards some element of rough sleeping. One external stakeholder referenced a young person who had been staying with his Granny, then an Aunt, then sofa surfing who eventually ended up sleeping in his car and *walking the streets before he presented to the Housing Executive. (EXT)*

Levels of youth homelessness

5.6 Data on the actual numbers of young people presenting as homeless to the NI Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts was examined in Section 4. As part of the interview process with stakeholders, there were divergent responses in relation to the level of youth homelessness. Whilst acknowledging that Covid-19 has impacted the patterns of homeless presentation, many respondents suggested that youth homelessness was increasing prior to the pandemic, and that further increases are likely as a consequence, post-pandemic. A small number of respondents suggested that numbers had reduced as result of Covid-19, but that they had seen some evidence of parents asking young people to leave the family home because they were not sticking to the Government regulations and restrictions. This was summed up by one respondent – *this has increased during the pandemic, the stress of lockdown, the pressure of overcrowding situations and the tensions in a household. (INT)*

Respondents who thought youth homelessness was increasing noted the following:

It's increasing – I have seen the data produced by Housing Services – and the providers have told us, the Floating Support services are under huge pressure and there is a waiting list of young people. A lot of young people are sofa surfing – and there needs to be crisis intervention. (INT)

I think there has been an increase in young people in housing need, particularly those aged 18 – 25 years. They can't afford the private rental sector because the Housing Benefit doesn't cover it and there is a lack of other options. When they come to us, they say – I'm reluctant to go into hostels, so I'm staying with friends. I think there are more women in this situation because they are vulnerable and at risk. (INT)

Specific reference was made to increases in the numbers amongst young people in Group 2 by some respondents. However, it should be noted that these comments were based on respondents' subjective experience and recall for their area, and are not necessarily borne out in the recorded data, which suggests a decline in presenters aged 16 – 17 to both the HSC Trusts and the NI Housing Executive.

There were wider concerns and comments in relation to two factors; namely the ability to respond to young presenters because of the Covid-19 situation and because of the pressure on the use of temporary accommodation, the range of placement options. One Housing Executive respondent summed up a wider concern: *At the minute we are getting numerous cases – and there's not really enough time to probe in terms of what exactly has happened. They are in crisis – and we need to get them temporary accommodation and it's a matter of dropping everything else. (INT)*

Another respondent noted: *The levels are fairly static at the moment, perhaps a low increase, but the numbers in temporary accommodation has increased significantly. Informal arrangements weren't possible because of Covid-19. (INT)* Interestingly, whilst the demand for temporary accommodation has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, increases in terms of homeless presenters and acceptances have not been so evident. This may be a direct result of the lack of informal arrangements for this age group.

Key Findings 2 - Preventing youth homelessness

5.7 The importance of preventing homelessness has already been noted in Sections 2 and 3 of this report. Stakeholders were asked to consider the current strategies employed in Northern Ireland and to indicate what has been successful and what could be improved. A number of respondents were aware of the Homeless Prevention Fund and the type and range of preventative projects funded over the last two years. More detailed reference is made to a number of these projects in Section 7 of this report. This sub-section covers the research objective - *Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people.*

A number of themes emerged from the discussion on prevention. These were as follows:

- Age and circumstances
- Prevention through early intervention in families and the community
- Prevention through the education and youth sectors
- Prevention through changes in the preparation for independence – for young people in Group 1
- Prevention through support for young people in Groups 2 and 3

Age and Circumstances

5.8 Responses under the heading of preventing youth homelessness indicated that a different approach was needed for young people, dependent on their age and circumstances. There was considerable reference to a perceived and actual link between young people being ‘care experienced’ (Group 1 young people) and then at some later stage becoming homeless. Responses suggested that this was more significant for young people who had been in residential care settings compared to those in foster or kinship care arrangements.

Respondents noted that the focus on preventing homelessness amongst young people from a residential care background needed to take a number of factors into account. These included a change from the young person having everything done for them, to having to do or learn to do things for themselves. *In the children’s home everything is done for them...but then they can’t make meals or wash themselves or look after their flats.* (EXT) This linked into further comments around the lack of life skills preparation done in advance of a young person moving into either supported accommodation or their own tenancy; whereby the young person was deemed to not be tenancy ready.

There needs to be a real focus on making a young person tenancy ready. To be knowledgeable about the Housing Executive, and their housing options – what’s available. (INT)

In the care background they are spoon fed, everything done for them. They are lifted and laid with pocket money and allowances. And then like overnight they are into Supported accommodation and it’s a very different environment. They can’t even boil an egg; we are teaching them the basics of cooking. (EXT)

The transition between being in care and being in the community was seen as being a vital element in preventing homelessness. The majority of respondents emphasised that whilst the various statutory and voluntary agencies involved with those in care and care leavers are doing their best, the complex presenting and historical issues surrounding individual young people often negatively impact the potential for a successful transition. *A lot of the young people we see have a history of care, where foster placements have broken down continually, where young people are ejected from the care system at 16 or 17 because the children’s home can’t cope with them. And they move into supported accommodation or a tenancy. But they have no experience of living on their own and they come from what was a chaotic home life. They are put into flats but they have never paid a bill or know how to budget. And isolation is the biggest thing for them, being on their own. And this can make them vulnerable in the community, and often this combined with loneliness leads to anti-social behaviour and partying.* (EXT)

The time-line of making the transition from a care setting to living independently in the community was also seen as a significant factor. Timescales for ongoing support from Social Services were highlighted in Section 2 (up to the age of 21 and up to the age of 24 in particular circumstances). However, respondents made references to a window of opportunity between the ages of 18 and 20, when a young person leaving care may be in supported accommodation, albeit it was noted that young people may choose to leave at any point and make their own housing arrangements. The following comment summed up responses from external providers.

We are expecting them to live independently on their own and then it's a big shock to them. We are nearly setting them up to fail in this way. We are trying to teach them some skills but often they have no skills whatsoever in terms of finance and budgeting, washing and ironing. At 18 then the shock is unbelievable. The rug is pulled from under them. In the care system they are throwing money at them – it's a really difficult problem for us. (EXT)

Whilst some of these factors were clearly relevant to young people in Groups 2 and 3, there was also recognition of much wider factors relating to the young person's circumstances for these groups, which were summarised earlier in Table 14. These wider causal factors (contributing to the young person becoming homeless) were also viewed as important in the discussion about how, when and whether homelessness could be firstly prevented or secondly responded to in a positive way. Factors such as mental health issues, a history of trauma, drug or alcohol addictions were all seen as being central to a wider preventative approach; respondents indicated that if these wider person-specific issues were not dealt with, approaches to preventing or responding to homelessness per se would be stunted at best and ineffective at worst.

Finally, respondents noted a number of mechanisms and approaches which they suggested could bring additional focus to the theme of preventing youth homelessness. These fell into four categories and are examined below. It is also worth noting that another common theme amongst respondents recognised that in many cases the young person cannot stay at home (for safety or other reasons) but that in a significant number of cases the young person would effectively be 'better off' if they did remain at home or return home. This was summarised by a number of respondents.

Parents come to the end of their tether – but perhaps underlying it is mental issues. From one point of view the best thing is for the young person to stay at home and work through the issues. It is not necessarily a housing issue, more of a family relationship issue. (INT)

If we could explore the reality of the situation with young people at an earlier stage. Once they realise that the likelihood is that they would be going into a hostel, then home might seem like a better option. (EXT)

This overarching theme was placed beside another underlying conclusion from respondents; that leaving home (or being outside of the home setting) at an early age typically did not result in a positive outcome for the young person. Respondents were therefore very vocal about the need for a heightened focus on homelessness prevention strategies and mechanisms aimed at young people.

Prevention through early intervention in families and the community

5.9 Respondents clearly linked the reasons for youth homelessness to the potential for developing more preventative approaches; they acknowledged that if family breakdown is to be avoided and youth homelessness either at best prevented or delayed until the young person is older, then considerably more early intervention needs to be targeted on families and the wider community. Respondents emphasised the need to deal with the many causal factors including poverty/deprivation, abuse within the home setting, and issues relating to mental health and addictions.

There needs to be more intervention at the early age, where you can see issues coming down the track. When we get them at age 16 or 18 behaviours have already been built into their character over a period of 4 – 5 years. It's very difficult to modify that then. (EXT)

There are missed opportunities from very early in a child's life – and we should be trying to prevent this moving to homelessness. (INT)

Respondents suggested that early intervention should be targeted in the following ways:

- Through Social Services family intervention – *Social Services need to have more involvement at an earlier stage to prevent homelessness. (INT)*
- Through Housing Executive Patch Managers. One Housing Executive respondent noted that in their area all tenants have been provided with a Handbook including details of support agencies.
- Through mediation; this would need to be provided through the relevant HSC Trust or health funded services, and is not eligible to be funded by Supporting People or part of the service delivery of housing or support staff. Through a range of health-related practitioners including GPs, counsellors, mental health practitioners etc. as well as strategically via the Public Health Agency.
- Through schools and other educational settings.

Housing Executive respondents talked about how, where possible, they make contact with a family member to establish if the young person is homeless and also to assess any opportunity for the young person to return to the original home setting. This was not without its difficulties, both in terms of trying to establish accurate information from the young person and in trying to develop some level of mediation with the family member. Respondents pointed to a certain level of success with this approach. *One of the first things we do is to contact the families. This has some measure of success – when you get speaking to the parents and they recognise the seriousness of it – it's a wakeup call. So we do phone-calls to try and establish homelessness – we ask Mum – have you asked X to leave? We try to get to the bottom of what happened – it's a fine line, being tactful and sensitive. (INT)*

One respondent suggested that input from external agencies helps in this area, enabling all parties to 'prevent' the situation moving into homelessness for the young person. They said: *MACS in Belfast were good at mediation and speaking to young people at their level. I find that a lot of young people are close to non-verbal – it's yes or no to questions. I was in a few interviews and MACS were in with them; their staff had a skill that we don't necessarily have and they relayed information in a good way. (INT)*

Respondents referenced projects that already provided support for mediation, including the Housing Rights project which helps in mediation between young people and their family and/or a private landlord. Stakeholders suggested that more of this approach was required and that this could have a significant impact.

There's also a lack of family mediation...whilst there are some services, they are not there sufficiently to help a lot of young people maintain at home. The challenge for us is what we are presented with – sometimes it's too late to prevent this. (INT)

Family mediation – there is definitely a role for this and room for improvement in this area. (EXT)

I would suggest trying to maintain family relationships as that is the best thing. But they bounce around different family supports and staying with others – there are missed opportunities to mediate, to support and to help them stay. (INT)

Prevention through the education and youth sectors

5.10 Respondents also pointed to the opportunity to expand preventative work in the education sector, highlighting different options such as providing young people with more detailed and earlier information on firstly what it means to be homeless and secondly, in terms of preparation for independent living. Suggestions were made in relation to the latter in terms of budgeting and financial management, cooking and laundry skills as well as personal hygiene and knowing how to look after yourself. One respondent said the following: *Wider preventative work – it's very wide and so complex. Every family situation is different – there may be mental health and addiction issues – so it needs to be a joint effort with schools and families. Need to ensure young people are tenancy ready in terms of practical skills...school is one of the best places to discuss homelessness. (INT)*

In addition, respondents pointed to the provision of information via informal youth settings and the Youth Service. Targeted support for those turning 18 was suggested; *whilst I'm positive about education in schools, it needs to target vulnerable young people, not a general approach. (EXT)* Respondents also suggested that there needs to be a discussion with young people in the 16- to 25-year-old age group, at different points and through different avenues, to enable them to have a better insight into what homelessness might mean for them. *There needs to be a conversation with young people – what it's like to be an adult, what it's like to be on your own and what it's like to manage a tenancy. (INT)*

A number of external respondents mentioned courses and programmes that they already deliver in this area and reference is made to a number of projects and models in Section 7, Youth Homelessness – Good practice models.

Prevention through changes in the preparation for independence – for young people in Group 1

5.11 Respondents across the board felt that whilst considerable work had gone into Pathway planning for young people leaving care, more could be done in relation to equipping them to have the right tools for independent living. There was acknowledgement that this was a complex and multi-faceted area to cover, not least because, according to a number of respondents, the young people in

care settings frequently did not want to engage within the age range of 14 – 16 years old, albeit that they recognised that this was because these young people have experienced adversity and childhood trauma which impacted their capacity to interact and engage. Respondents made suggestions in terms of life skills preparation, training in budgeting and finances, skills development for making community and social networks etc., as well as recognising the need for focussing on how services are designed, the culture and ethos of delivery, the training and skills of staff and their approach to engaging with young people.

There was very clear reflection by respondents across the different sectors that preventing homelessness amongst care leavers was a critical element of an overall preventative strategy, and that if the linkages between leaving care and youth homelessness were already known, then this type of approach should be embedded across all the agencies involved. One external stakeholder summed it up as follows: *If the care population is over-represented in homelessness in general, HSC Trusts have a duty to help young people be more prepared....if you want to put a dent in or break the cycle of homelessness – if the population is over-represented with care experienced young people then you have to break the cycle for them and look at the frequency.* (EXT)

Prevention through support for young people in Groups 2 and 3

5.12 Respondents cross-referenced the opportunities for prevention for the young people in these groups. Comment was made about young people aged 16 and 17 years in Group 2. One respondent noted that these are often young people *on the edge of care, with some Social Services involvement in the past, and also who are disengaged from education or involved with Youth Justice.* Prevention of homelessness amongst these young people is perhaps the most difficult out of the three groups as firstly they are not coming through a known/planned pathway (Group 1) and secondly on the basis of age they are much younger and more vulnerable than the young people in Group 3. Section 2 looked at the legislation and policy underpinning the response to homelessness amongst this group, and the sub-section later in this Section (paragraphs 5.17 and 5.18 – themes 4 and 5) discuss in more detail what currently happens when a young person aged 16 – 17 years old presents as homeless.

As noted earlier, many of the young people in these two groups (in particular Group 3) have not come directly to the Housing Executive, but rather have come via an elongated and circuitous pathway, often living for periods of time with wider family members and then sofa surfing with friends. By the time they present to the Housing Executive, any opportunity for family mediation has been diluted. As one Housing Executive respondent noted:

In most cases we are seeing them after the fact – it's happened. It's too late by then in the majority of cases to prevent the homelessness. And for many of them getting the 70 homeless points is preferable to going back home, because of the waiting times to get a house. (INT)

Similar to Group 1, respondents suggested that breakdown of placements in temporary accommodation or sharing arrangements/permanent tenancies could be prevented if there was a better level of tenancy readiness and independent living skills. One respondent noted: *Having a tenancy is a big thing for them, having to manage it. They need support to live independently and the skills to manage their electricity and gas, their bills and buying and preparing food.* (INT) Another respondent referenced the input of Patch Managers in their housing area to try and prevent

homelessness amongst younger tenants. They said: *They help them to get their benefits – Universal Credit – to cover housing costs. And to make referrals for Floating Support all at a low level.... but if they have high level support needs, support is somewhat limited.* (INT)

Whilst respondents did provide a wide range of suggestions on how and in what way preventative strategies and initiatives could be developed and improved, there was also a sense that the young person's pervading social circumstances meant that for some young people there was an inevitability about their pathway into homelessness. This was summed up by one respondent. *I think something should be done throughout the young person's life – some sort of intervention, with more effort and support – to build up their (young person's) confidence – put them on the right track of education and employment.* (INT)

In thinking about prevention of homelessness, respondents also commented on the interconnection to the other background factors that the young person has within their current circumstances. They suggested that the preventative element also needs to take this into account. One respondent noted: *When they come to us as homeless, addictions and drugs are often involved. They have been failed before they come to the HE.* (INT) Another respondent suggested that many of the factors involved are over and above the Housing Executive's responsibility. *Everything gets left to the Housing Executive, but all of this goes way beyond the role of the HE.* (INT)

Key Findings 3 - Challenges in service delivery – accommodation and support

5.13 This sub-section looks at how services are delivered to the three defined groups of young homeless people, and identifies particular gaps in services and barriers to service delivery, as well as challenges in terms of temporary accommodation, permanent 'move on' options and tenancy readiness together with the need for suitable and appropriate support. In addition, throughout this sub-section reference is made to the theme of interagency working. This was explored with all three types of stakeholder (Housing Executive, HSC Trusts and other external providers) with particular reference to systems and processes relating to the young people leaving care (Group 1), the implementation of the Regional Good Practice guidance (Group 2) and the implementation of the Housing Solutions process (primarily Group 1 but also young people in Groups 2 and 3). This sub-section sought to highlight opportunities to better implement interagency working in order to successfully deliver homelessness prevention strategies and solutions.

This sub-section therefore covers two research objectives as follows:

- *Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing 'move on' options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready.*
- *Identification and exploration of the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions.*

This sub-section covers the following themes and headings; these are mainly broken down into the three distinct groups of young people, and then towards the end of this sub-section there are some universal themes which cover young people in all three groups.

Themes for Group 1 young people

Theme 1: Temporary accommodation

Theme 2: Preparation for independent living

Theme 3: Ongoing support

Themes for Group 2 young people

Theme 4: Systems and processes – homelessness assessment

Theme 5: Temporary accommodation

Themes for Group 3 young people

Theme 6: Homelessness assessment

Theme 7: Temporary accommodation

Overarching themes

Theme 8: Independent living skills and support for young people in Groups 2 and 3

Theme 9: Permanent housing options for young people in Groups 1, 2 and 3

Theme 1 – Temporary accommodation for Group 1 – coming out of care

5.14 There was consensus across all stakeholder groups that there was a good range of different types of immediate temporary accommodation for young people in Group 1 at the point of leaving care; albeit that there was some regional variation with respondents in certain areas.

Discussion centred on jointly commissioned supported accommodation projects, the GEMS Scheme, HSC Trust supported lodgings schemes, as well as other Supporting People funded temporary accommodation for young people. Comments on the availability and suitability of accommodation for young people coming out of care are summarised below, looking in turn at each of the options. Further details on this provision is looked at in Section 6 (in feedback from young people) and in Section 7 (models of good practice). In addition, a number of respondents noted the current review of jointly commissioned services. *The jointly commissioned accommodation and services for young people is fairly well established and subject to its own review.* (INT)

5.14.1 Jointly commissioned supported accommodation projects

- **Good relationships/communication** – internal and external respondents referenced good relationships between themselves and the providers of jointly commissioned supported accommodation projects; this was highlighted by the NI Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts. Overall, this led to good communication about placements, smooth transitions and successful outcomes. Reference was made to regular meetings between the main stakeholders.
- **Planning** – whilst in some respects contradictory to the comments on communication, a number of stakeholders suggested that there was insufficient planning in relation to the move to supported accommodation projects, and in terms of the overall accommodation pathway. *Planning and assessment prior to 16 – it's not planned – the preparation needs to start much earlier.* (INT) In addition, a number of respondents suggested that they found there were

insufficient beds available in supported accommodation projects, and this was particularly relevant for providers outside of Belfast.

- **Suitability** – overall respondents said that the jointly commissioned projects are fit for purpose and did a good job in supporting the young person in their transition out of the care system. A small number of respondents raised some concern that occasionally projects were unable to work with the young person because of their wider needs; one respondent summarised these as: *The big ones are mental health, addictions and young offending history.* (INT) This was often linked to being able to access appropriate and ongoing support for their non-housing needs; and some respondents also referred to ‘stickability’ with the young person. *We need to allow a young person to remain in accommodation (even with a substance abuse) and bring in the expert support they need.* (INT) *We need to stick with the young person no matter what. They don’t need someone else giving up on them. The young person’s behaviour is acting out. We have to balance this out against a risk to staff in supported accommodation – it just can’t always be the reaction to ‘put them out’ – and then they move somewhere else.* (INT) The perceived and actual suitability of the accommodation for other care leavers was also noted. One respondent highlighted this as follows: *A lot of young people in supported accommodation don’t need to be there but their housing options are so limited that there is a blockage – firstly this is not helping the young person and secondly it is blocking spaces for young people with greater support needs.* (INT)
- **Timescales** – some respondents felt that two years of accommodation support was insufficient for young people with medium to high-level support needs, and that there should be more flexibility in extending their stay in these projects. In contrast, they understood that this would limit the throughput needed to free up spaces for young people coming out of the care system. One respondent noted: *Their day to day living skills are so limited, even things like personal hygiene and how to shop and cook. Whilst they are making progress in our schemes this is not at the rate in the timescale given that it would need to be in order to go and live independently in the community. They struggle to wash themselves, their clothes and to feed themselves.* (EXT)

5.14.2 GEMS Scheme

Comments about the GEMS scheme were largely positive. One external respondent described it as follows: *For young people who have been in foster care – and for foster carers – this is a scheme they can apply to, to get support, so they can maintain the young person further into adulthood – up to the age of 21 – where feasible if this can occur.* (EXT) The potential for extension beyond age 21 if the young person is in education was also noted.

Respondents felt this provided the natural transition for young people who had been in foster care arrangements, that it elongated their opportunities and chances to move into adulthood in a protective and supportive environment of a ‘family home’, and that overall it led to the most successful outcomes for young people moving out of care. One external respondent said: *If young people can stay in the fostering home for as long as possible – that is brilliant. In the general population young people are staying at home for longer – until they are 25, 26 or 27.* (EXT) Another noted: *Young people in long-term settled placement in foster care can often make a better transition, but for those in residential or unsettled foster care there can be difficulties. We spend so much time fire-fighting the risks and there can be limited skills development.* (EXT)

One external respondent highlighted a critical part of the GEMS scheme, not only providing continuity with previous living arrangements but also in the form of positive role models. They compared this to other accommodation options which do not necessarily have a role model who the young person can become close to. *It's a challenge for young people who don't have role models and it's a challenge for young people with no support networks. They don't have anything to benchmark their behaviour against.* (EXT) In addition, there was discussion on the fact that whilst this is a continuation of the fostering arrangements for those post age 18, *they are now adults, and in many ways, these are not placements but 'living arrangements'.* (EXT)

5.14.3 HSC Trust supported lodgings schemes

Respondents noted that supported lodgings schemes are currently being rolled out by the HSC Trusts, where the young person can stay with an approved host family, with recruitment and set-up arrangements underway in a number of Trusts. There was positive feedback that this will provide a further alternative to supported accommodation schemes, in particular for young people with lower-level support needs. Respondents made positive comments about supported lodgings. *If you have the right person to make that connection – and give flexibility.* (EXT) The nature of the scheme was described by one respondent as follows: *We are looking for a host family for a specific accommodation need and for stability...not as high scrutiny as per fostering. A degree of finance is provided for the boarding out placements to the carers. Then there would be a team of Social Workers to support the carers and the young person.* (EXT)

5.14.4 Other Supporting People funded temporary accommodation for young people

Respondents also saw a place for the other Supporting People funded temporary accommodation projects for young people, but suggested that these were only suitable for young people with low support needs and that this provision was more limited in terms of its geographical availability in some areas. *It might do as an emergency but it could cause worse trouble – we would be looking to get them moved back ASAP so that they are near any support (family) and healthcare.* (INT)

Some respondents also noted that within this group there are young people who have very complex and multiple needs; they noted that in some circumstances an early departure from their 'care setting' i.e. foster care or residential children's homes was necessary because these settings could not cope with the most challenging behaviours. A lack of accommodation-based options for young people in this category was highlighted. One respondent noted: *There is a lack of options and a gap for young people who are very, very complex.* (INT) Another noted: *It's the young people who are really chaotic and have had Adverse Childhood Experiences, who can't cope in a supported living environment.* (INT)

In addition, respondents referenced the fact that some young people who are exiting the care system decide to turn down the accommodation and support services offered through pathway planning. Respondents noted: *Inevitably some of them at 18 walk – we try to risk assess those environments and provide support to make the transition.* (EXT) And: *For the young people in care we work very hard to secure supported accommodation. But some want to move on at 18, they want a social tenancy or to go into the private rented sector.* (EXT) This further highlights the importance of early engagement with young people, early planning including informing and involving the young person in planning for their future housing, and moving at the young person's pace.

Respondents also commented that a period of time (the longer the better) in supported accommodation normally results in better outcomes. *If they get a grounding in supported accommodation services; so if young people can stay in these, and stay in them for longer this will contribute to a more positive output. But often the young person resists, they challenge in terms of wanting to engage and accept advice.* (EXT) There was acknowledgement that in many cases these young people resurface as homeless in the age group and circumstances covered by Group 3.

Projects providing accommodation and/or support for young people with very complex needs are explored in more detail in Section 7.

Theme 2 – Preparation for independent living for Group 1 – coming out of care

5.15 This theme has already been touched on in the sub-section on prevention of youth homelessness; with particular reference to young people in Group 1 (paragraph 5.11). Respondents highlighted this as a critical gap, with a direct linkage to causing or resulting in youth homelessness. Again this was noted above in theme 1 where respondents suggested that planning and preparation needs to start at an earlier stage. A key part of respondents thinking, as noted at paragraph 5.13, was that if the care experienced population is over-represented in the homeless figures, then more should be done to prepare them for independent living, and by association to reduce the likelihood of a move into homelessness.

Differences were noted between young people in residential children's homes and foster homes, with comments that the latter provides a more normalised family setting in which preparation for independent living is integrated into everyday living through household chores. Feedback raised concerns about the opportunity for similar preparation to take place in children's homes.

There is zero preparation for living on their own. They can't boil a kettle or do the laundry. Within children's homes they are not being prepared for move on...there is a missing link. Chores and household jobs are part of family life but in their case, this is missing. (INT)

For young people in residential children's homes respondents noted that preparation for adulthood and independent living was part of the pathway planning; respondents mentioned input in terms of budgeting money, managing laundry, menu planning, shopping and cooking and maintaining their own bedroom. There was acknowledgement that it was helpful if this could be started at an earlier stage and that this is being actioned in one HSC Trust at the 14 plus stage. They recognised that the plan for independence is formalised in more detail from age 16, and at that stage the focus was not only on living skills but also thinking about training and employment. There was also acknowledgement that much of this depends on the young person's willingness to engage. One external respondent said: *Whilst this is offered it's down to the young person's engagement. Unfortunately the young people in residential care have other priorities and often don't take these options.* (EXT)

External providers emphasised the importance of a further two years in a jointly commissioned supported accommodation project, post children's home. *There is a 'window of opportunity' – a really*

crucial age in their teens – and they are missing it to learn the skills set – then they come to us with no skills and it's the worst age with their hormones. (EXT)

A number of themes were repeated throughout this discussion, highlighting issues relating to the timing of a move from residential care or other settings, and the level/type of preparation in place.

5.15.1 Preparation to manage a tenancy

Respondents emphasised the need to ensure that young people leaving care had or were developing the necessary skills to manage a tenancy, with most stakeholders noting that this area could be improved. One respondent noted: *For young people coming from mainstream residential care whilst they get a lot of care and love they are lacking in their development of independent living skills – this is then a very real barrier – they lack the very basics. (EXT)*

Learning the skills and having the support to develop these skills...there is a deficit here in terms of what we teach our young people. Building skills and capacity is a crucial issue. For example – skills in terms of budgeting, topping up electricity and doing a weekly shop. (EXT)

5.15.2 Preparation to manage themselves

Respondents also noted that in many cases the young people are in a deficit in terms of being able to manage themselves, and being emotionally able or ready to move into supported accommodation and then in due course into the community. Some stakeholders felt that this was because of their childhood history, and that whilst HSC Trusts have access to a Looked After Children Therapeutic service, more needs to be done to help young people work through their emotional and psychological issues via a strong therapeutic input into the care system and the leaving care system. Practical support was also needed given that the children were moving from a setting where their other needs were managed by adults and through services coming to them, into adult services in the community which they would have to manage and attend external appointments. One respondent noted this: *The management of their medical appointments and services – for example community addictions – preparing young people for that is very challenging. (EXT)* A further respondent said: *The threshold for adult services is very different to children's services. And it's difficult for young people to engage in this. Three strikes and you're out and young people don't always see the need for services and disengage, but then later find they need them. (EXT)*

A number of respondents suggested that this should be the key area worked on, even before any other skills development for independent living. This was noted as follows: *There needs to be support to help them live independently. But because the most of them are very complex cases we need to rethink the approach in terms of supporting young people. We need to return to the main focus, their mental health. They can't learn skills until the main problem is dealt with. There needs to be early intervention – there needs to be trauma based work and therapeutic based work. In many ways our work is aimed at trying to keep them alive, because of their suicidal ideation – never mind helping them to live independently. (EXT)*

5.15.3 Preparation to develop social networks

A final area noted by stakeholders was in relation to young people in Group 1 having difficulties in developing friendship and social networks in the community, and that this in time interacts with their ability to sustain accommodation. One respondent noted: *We need to do more in terms of supporting young people to build links in social networks and into the community, so that once they are 18 or 21 – they can move into their own accommodation in the community.* (EXT) Another respondent highlighted this area as one of the biggest deficits. *The more significant gap is emotional and social support, loneliness. This leads to breakdown, they have no relationships with anyone – no parental relationship, no positive peer networks. A real lack of social skills and resilience skills.* (EXT)

A number of respondents reflected on past service provision in this area, where larger children's residential homes had independent training flats which were set aside from the main facility, and where young people received independence training and the opportunity to trial this in a safe environment. Respondents suggested that this was a loss to the system, particularly as young people had aspired to take this progression route; whilst respondents recognised that the supported accommodation projects aimed to replicate a similar learning opportunity. One respondent put it like this: *Ten years ago the HSC Trust had a practice flat for preparation for independent living – then that all changed. At that point they were able to prepare to do their own shopping, own cooking and even being prepared to walk anywhere.* (EXT)

Theme 3 – Ongoing support for young people in Group 1 – coming out of care

5.16 Following comments in themes 1 and 2 about the need for support within the care setting and then in the leaving care setting, respondents also highlighted the need for ongoing support when young people in Group 1 were moving between accommodation options and in addition, into the community. Respondents were positive about the various Floating Support and Step-Down models, aimed at prolonging and providing support for a further period of time.

As in themes 1 and 2 they acknowledged that even when this is in place some young people do not engage with the support whilst others drift off and make their own arrangements. Respondents made the comparison of young people in this grouping to those in Groups 2 and 3, and emphasised that Group 1 young people have access to the best ongoing support because they are 'looked after children' and are therefore eligible to a level of support including financial support up to the age of 21 and later if they are in full-time education.

There was recognition that Floating Support can provide just the right level of support for young people, in particular for those with lower-level needs. One respondent noted this: *They are not all taking substances and involved in risky behaviour. Many of the young people are quiet and compliant – and we need to make sure that they and their needs are not forgotten in any planning.* (INT)

External providers suggested that in some cases Floating Support needs to be more intensive and also available in different ways and at different times, making the point that crises often do not occur during office hours. One respondent noted: *Floating Support needs to be more intense for the really vulnerable complex needs the young people have – it needs to be 24/7, not just daytime – a 24-hour service by phone. And if they are in a crisis then they should be able to come back to the project*

(supported accommodation) if something happens – they could sleep here overnight if they need to – or we could get support from a GP or CPN. (EXT) Another respondent noted: There is a need for intensive Floating Support – not just 9 – 5 – someone to phone when the young person is in real crisis. (EXT)

Another external provider said that Floating Support needs to be particularly intensive at the outset of a young person's accommodation move. *When they do get accommodation, they need a lot of support early on. And then when they get in and shut the door this is often the first time they have been on their own. (EXT) There was also recognition that support needs to float in and out dependent on the young person's needs, but that at some point the support is time-bound, given the pressure on resources with other young people needing the service. This was summed up as follows: Once we step away where do they go if something does go wrong...there is a fine line between all going well and problems coming in. At times we have to step back with the Floating Support because we know there are other young people waiting to get some support. (EXT)*

A number of HSC Trusts noted that as well as Floating Support provided by external providers, they have their own in-house community living support schemes, managed by their own outreach staff. This is a wraparound support scheme for young people who are identified as being able to live independently. Other HSC Trust respondents noted that in their area: *There is a long waiting list – you can't get it when you need for an emergency situation. We don't have as many options in terms of Floating Support in our Trust area. (EXT) HSC Trust respondents noted that the need for support and the options in terms of availability and suitability is taken into account at the HSC Trust panels which consider the accommodation pathways for young people moving out of care arrangements/ settings aged 18.*

Also in the discussion on Floating Support respondents reiterated the comments about leaving care; that the majority of young people in Group 1 do not have *a positive social or family support network or system in their lives (EXT)*; therefore having ongoing and follow-up support as they move on is vital.

Theme 4 – Systems and processes for young people in Group 2 – homelessness assessment

5.17 Under this theme respondents discussed the process and policies underpinning the legislation and the Regional Good Practice Guidance relating to young people aged 16 to 17 years old, who present as homeless. The purpose of this discussion was to establish what happens in reality in terms of the referral for a homeless assessment – including the positive elements of the systems and processes and what could potentially be improved. This theme, together with theme 5 which includes coverage of the 10-day assessment period and assessment beds, attracted the most discussion. The majority of discussion focussed on the communication between the Housing Executive and HSC Trusts at the point of presentation, the homeless assessment and placement in assessment beds.

Housing Executive respondents felt the process of responding to and referring a young presenter from Group 2 went well from their end; firstly that their personnel understood the processes and procedures that should be put in place if a 16- or 17-year-old presented at the Housing Executive, and what they were obligated to do in line with the Regional Good Practice Guidance. Comments from Housing Executive respondents included the following:

If it's a 16- or 17-year-old then it's a child – we try to find out what's going on, if they are safe, what organisations are involved. Then we are in contact with the Gateway team – make sure they are aware – we are obliged to contact them. (INT)

A lot of 16- and 17-year-olds may be 'known' to Social Services – but they are not 'LAC'ed¹⁶⁰. There was a Social Worker at one stage and then the case has been closed. We speak to Gateway to try and see what can be done to prevent homelessness. I would ring Mum first – that's the main contact – 2 or 3 times out of 10 Mum says – I didn't throw them out...I want her home, don't want them to go to Assessment beds. But if that isn't the case – if not, the next step is Gateway. (INT)

Our process is good; our safeguarding training is excellent – we know exactly what to do and who to phone – we know when to phone Gateway. (INT)

Likewise HSC Trust personnel¹⁶¹ indicated that the joint arrangements work well, and that referrals were coming in an appropriate way via a single point of entry, which in most Trusts was the Gateway team. One Trust respondent noted: *If the young person presents directly to the Housing Executive (at the moment by phone), then the Housing Executive refers them on to ourselves – we have the duty of care as the HSC Trust. The Housing Executive does liaise with us to see if they are already LACed. (EXT)* This respondent also noted that this works well because both parties have developed good communication and working relationships. *It works very well and it always has but a lot of that is because of the networking and the developing the relationship that we've done. We are keen to do this and work with the Housing Executive. (EXT)*

This system was summed up by one HSC Trust representative who noted: *This happens all the time. The Housing Executive refers them to the SPO (single point of entry) – or the Gateway. The Housing Executive do the initial part of the UNOCINI form and then we do the assessment. First of all we make sure the young person is actually homeless. We do this by a phone call or calling out to the family home or where they've been staying. We establish what the current situation is and see if it can maybe be resolved. The biggest majority of time they can't be (this respondent noted that the issue has gone too far and has gone on for too long to make return home an option) – then we start discussions around what work needs to be completed. (EXT)* Other HSC Trust representatives suggested that, based on their experience and knowledge, about 40% of cases result in the young person going home, if it has been assessed that this is a safe and viable option.

Other external stakeholders suggested that the joint arrangement had not always or previously worked well, and that young people had at times been bounced back and forth between the two statutory agencies. One HSC Trust respondent said: *There have been a few reincarnations over time to account for changes in practice. But I think generally it works ok in terms of young homeless – there are not a lot of problems operationally. (EXT)*

¹⁶⁰ LACed – this term is used to refer to a young person who has been deemed a 'child in need' and who is a 'looked after child'; the term being used to refer to the process of bringing the child in under this definition

¹⁶¹ It is worth noting that all the HSC Trust respondents were senior managers.

HSC Trust respondents also noted that young homeless people in Group 2 may also present directly to the Gateway team, albeit noting that this is relatively infrequent or via other Social Services teams, for example the Intensive Adolescent support team working with young people on the edge of care, and also through other professionals e.g. youth workers, teachers etc.

Housing Executive respondents did raise a number of concerns under this theme as follows:

- HE personnel highlighted different responses by HSC Trusts dependent on the age of the young person; namely that the closer they were to 18 the slower the response. *If they are 17 years and six months – the closer they are to 18 – there’s a reluctance to help from Gateway – their attitude is – can you not just sort them out – this is my perception of it. When they’re 17 ½ then it plays out a bit longer – keep it going back and forth – knowing that it will be our problem and Social Services then think – we don’t need to deal with it any more.* (INT)
- HE personnel felt that once they had passed the case over to the HSC Trust that there was lack of communication or updates back to them. *It’s not always straightforward, it can take a few days. There’s not much information comes back our way and this can be frustrating.* (INT)

Universal support was noted in relation to the role of Housing Advisors in general; that in the new way of doing things within the Housing Executive, the provision of a consistent Housing Advisor for a young client was a very positive development, which helped to facilitate onward referral of Group 2 young people to the HSC Trust. *This was a really positive change. The person only has one point of contact; before they were previously passed on a lot – and bounced around the system. Now it’s a much better system –and this also goes for 16/17-year-olds – to just have one person to speak to.* (INT) However, respondents also felt that generic role of the Housing Advisors meant they were not always best equipped to deal with the range of issues that a young person might present with. *But it is a generic role and has a big scope. We can’t know everything and we’re not professionals or Social Workers.* (INT)

Included in this discussion there was support for the provision of two Young People’s Housing Advisors in the Home Team at the Housing Centre in Belfast. Respondents had experience of young people being actively assessed and supported through this provision, and all the comments were very positive. Alongside this, respondents felt this was a model that should be developed and rolled out across the other Regions and offices; albeit that they understood that the level of demand outside of Belfast would not justify full-time personnel in this role in every District but that it might be helpful to have at least one Young People’s Housing Advisor in each of the three Housing Executive Regions (Belfast, North and South). The following comments were noted: *There should be one in each of the Districts –for example, Derry don’t have this but they are the other main city and there’s a lot of young people presenting there.* (INT) Alternatively Housing Executive respondents suggested that it would be helpful if the two Young People’s Housing Advisors could be available for Housing Advisors in other Districts to speak to, if required.

Another interesting comment from the discussion about Group 2 young people came from some of the HSC Trust representatives. They noted that young people presenting as homeless at ages 16 and 17, whilst not formally under the Trust care at the point of presentation, may have had previous interaction with Social Services. One respondent summed this up by saying: *We would ask are there*

cases which were closed too early? How many of the young people coming at this age – were already known to Social Services? (EXT) Comments such as this point back to the discussion in the last section on prevention and early intervention.

Theme 5 – Temporary accommodation for young people in Group 2

5.18 This part of the interview focussed on discussing the temporary accommodation options for young people in Group 2, starting with discussion on the assessment process and 10-day assessment beds, and then move-on into suitable accommodation if the young person was deemed to be a ‘child in need’ and was LACed. The early part of this discussion also focussed on the process undertaken by the HSC Trust to establish if it was suitable for the young people to return home (this has been covered in some detail above under the heading of prevention - paragraph 5.8 and also noted in theme 4).

A number of key themes were reported as follows:

5.18.1 The assessment period

The Regional Guidance provides for an assessment period of 10 days¹⁶²; discussion on this related to young people who were moved into an assessment bed in Jointly commissioned supported accommodation for this period of time. A number of concerns were raised in relation to the timescale; some respondents felt the provision of 10 days was very tight to turn around a full assessment. One example was given in relation to finding out information about what type and level of threat a young person was under, and how this type of investigation would typically take longer than 10 days. One Housing Executive respondent noted: *In some cases they are being used for much longer than they are intended for.* (INT) A HSC Trust respondent also indicated that if they require assessment beds for longer periods than the 10-day allocation, that they seek an arrangement for this in terms of an extension to the time period. They then noted that this may be because the assessment needs a longer period of time for a specific reason, but that it may also be because: *We don’t have the particular type of accommodation or its availability – that the young person needs – it’s a challenge in terms of what the options are.* (EXT)

5.18.2 The number and distribution of assessment beds

There was mixed feedback on whether the number of assessment beds in Northern Ireland (12 in total)¹⁶³ was sufficient for the level of demand and need. In addition, the unequal distribution across the HSC Trust areas was also noted by some respondents.

Feedback from some respondents suggested that in their area they had insufficient access to assessment beds, and were concerned about what would happen if another Group 2 young person presented, as they knew the assessment beds were already occupied. One HSC Trust representative said: *It’s not enough – we would need three – with some flexibility in their use.* They based this comment on the level of demand for assessment beds, the fact that you can have a run of cases all requiring an assessment bed, the fact that the assessment period may extend beyond the 10 days and also the fact that there are limited move-on options (from the assessment bed/period).

¹⁶² This was extended to 15 days during the 2020/21 Covid-19 pandemic.

¹⁶³ This was reported on at paragraph 2.27, Table 1. This indicated that these beds are spread across four of the HSC Trust areas – with six in the South Eastern HSC Trust, two each in Belfast, Western and Northern HSC Trust areas and none in the Southern HSC Trust.

Some stakeholders felt that assessment beds were being used and ‘blocked’ for other purposes. One respondent noted the following: *They were set up for young people presenting to the Housing Executive today, who are not known to the HSC Trust. But they are being bed blocked by Trusts using them as an extension for their own young people, and the young people coming to the Housing Executive then end up in B&Bs.* (INT)

In contrast, stakeholders in other areas suggested that the assessment beds were under-used or under-occupied at times. A HSC Trust respondent commented: *The two assessment beds are not being used fully – and they are possibly being used inappropriately as crisis beds...we think the assessment beds should be reduced from 2 to 1 – and the other bed brought back into ordinary use – this would cut out hostel and B&B reliance.* (EXT)

5.18.3 Assessment and the 13-week period

There was some discussion about what respondents referred to as the 13- week period¹⁶⁴. This was the period between a young person being LACed, following the 10-day assessment period, and being within the initial service (in some Trusts this was referred to as the Family Intervention service) before they were transferred across to the Leaving Care team (in some Trusts this was referred to as the 16-plus team). It should be noted that there are different practices across the five HSC Trusts regarding the transfer of case responsibility once a decision is made that a child aged 16/17 years should become ‘looked after’. Respondents noted that some young people (particularly late entrants into care) were being moved around for this initial period of time, and that the impact of multiple moves was not positive for this group of young people.

A number of HSC Trust respondents noted that their two funded Social Workers (for youth homelessness) had been transferred from their Gateway service to the Family Intervention service, in order to be able to work more directly and intensively with young people from Group 2. This had been found to be more beneficial; respondents suggested that prior to this change young people had ‘drifted’ to some degree in the system.

One HSC Trust respondent said: *We moved the youth homeless Social Workers from the Gateway team to our Adolescence service. This is the best fit, it is potentially looking at the risk to them – and within this service there is the chance that they can engage with at risk young people at an earlier stage. Also being placed in the adolescence service – means there can be partnership working – across education, CAMHS, Barnardo’s etc.* This respondent went on to say: *About two years ago we noticed a number of young people coming into care through Gateway (in this age group) because the relationship had broken down at home. We noticed that the youth homeless Social Worker was not involved until after the assessment, and not at the point of the young person coming into the service. By switching to the involvement through the adolescence service – we are trying to avoid young people coming into care at that point and then bouncing around the system...so this way firstly we can do preventative early intervention work (to prevent need for them coming in) and secondly – if there is an assessed need,*

¹⁶⁴ The Children (Leaving Care) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, paragraphs 2 and 3. As previously noted young people who have been looked after on or after their 16th birthday and have been looked after for a period (not consecutive) of at least 13 weeks since their 14th birthday (who then meet the criteria for leaving and aftercare support under the legislation).

they can be connected to the adolescence service where there are various groups – creating connectivity for young person in the community, to harness a better social network. (EXT)

5.18.4 Availability of suitable move-on following the assessment period

A number of comments were made about the availability of suitable move-on following the assessment period; this has in part been noted above in terms of both the extended use of assessment beds until a suitable placement becomes available and also the use of B&Bs when no other move-on is available. It is worth noting a further comment made about the inappropriateness of B&B accommodation for this age group of young people, albeit that the use of B&B accommodation is not a practice across all HSC Trusts. One HSC Trust representative noted that on occasion, in the absence of any other available accommodation, they have had to place young people aged 16 and 17 into *unregulated bespoke arrangements – into B&B and hotel accommodation because there are not enough beds to place them in. We know that this is highly inappropriate – and we are committed to not doing this as we go forward. (EXT)* Temporary accommodation hostels were also deemed inappropriate. *We would be concerned if they get an offer of a hostel in Belfast – away from their support. (EXT)*

The HSC Trust respondents pointed to their desire to provide a young person coming via this route, who was now a 'child in need' and a 'looked after child', with a placement in supported accommodation for the next two years. However, they recognised that because of the throughput of Group 1 young people into these schemes, availability of a space was often an issue. One respondent noted: *We have a certain number of supported accommodation beds but they may not have capacity – and we don't want to place them in residential children's homes. (EXT)* Another respondent referenced that *supported accommodation beds are highly sought after* in their HSC Trust area, and that the Trust has a protocol in place that these beds are prioritised for Group 1 young people. Further comment was made by an external stakeholder: *Jointly commissioned projects always have a waiting list – then if you have to put them into emergency accommodation, like a B&B then you are only exacerbating the situation for them. (EXT)* Reference was made to the regular referral panels who sought to make placements for Group 2 young people in supported accommodation projects, but that the need and demand for these is high.

A further discussion in relation to suitable accommodation for Group 2 young people centred around the process and timing of them applying for social housing with the Housing Executive. A number of external stakeholders noted concerns about the timing of this for the young people. Whilst recognising that under-18s are not eligible legally to hold a tenancy, they suggested that the application process and administration could commence at a point earlier than 28 days before the 18th birthday. They noted that for many young people this is a period of anxiety, and not knowing what type of accommodation they may be offered, adds to this anxiety. One HSC Trust respondent summed this up as follows:

Where you are trying to prevent impending homelessness...this requirement doesn't work for this population... you need to start the discussion much earlier. Taking the referral sooner, enabling the housing points to accumulate earlier – there are a lot of anxieties for the young person – where am I going to be? They are staring down the face of homelessness. The respondent also noted that this

tends to be the young people with higher and more complex needs, who have more underlying issues and who have no other options to fall back on. These particular young people are not willing to go into supported accommodation. The respondent noted: *We need to start the conversation – realistically six months before they turn 18 – we need to get a head start with this population – in anticipation of a date we all know (their 18th birthday).* (EXT)

A similar comment was made by another HSC Trust respondent: *The 28 days is not helpful – it leads to a lot of uncertainty for the young person. They are anxious – then they are engaging in risk taking behaviours – like self-harming. If they could know earlier – 3 months before their 18th.* (EXT)

One HSC Trust respondent noted that a scheme had been piloted in the Southern area between the HSC Trust Transition team and Housing Solutions, which enabled young people aged 16 plus to have their housing assessment started at an earlier point, in order that by the age of 18 they would know some of their options. This respondent noted: *This was for young people coming up and who were going to acquire accommodation. There was forward planning to avoid the issue of youth homelessness. It was a very positive pilot but it hasn't continued....* (EXT)

In addition, respondents recognised that a number of young people in Group 2 prefer to move into independent living even though their skills are not sufficient for this. This is discussed in more detail under theme 8.

Theme 6 – Homelessness assessment for young people in Group 3

5.19 This theme was mainly discussed with Housing Executive respondents; they noted that this is essentially the 'adult' assessment for young people in this group aged 18 upwards (18 – 25). This was outlined at Section 2 of this report, referencing the primary legislation as the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 and the Housing (NI) Order 2003. Respondents emphasised that the statutory duty placed on them is to make enquiries into the person's circumstances in any homeless application, in particular considering the four tests: eligibility for homelessness assistance, actual or threat of homelessness, being in priority need and factors relating to intentionality. In general Housing Executive respondents noted: *Our process is good; we know what to ask and the trigger points – and what to ask on abuse – physical and emotional.* (INT)

Respondents made a number of other points:

- The fact that some young people in this age group delay going to the Housing Executive, and in some cases, in particular single young males, do not present at all;
- The fact that young people in this Group, whilst they may be homeless, they may not have additional support needs;
- The fact that many young people in this age group will not fall into any of the priority need categories, and will therefore not obtain FDA status;
- The fact that those who do not have FDA status, but nevertheless are on the housing waiting list for social housing, then experience a long waiting period. Combined with this were comments about their multiple other non-housing needs getting worse in the meantime.

Theme 7 looks in more detail at the options for those who do obtain FDA status and are eligible under the legislation to receive temporary accommodation.

Theme 7 – Temporary accommodation for young people in Group 3

5.20 There are a number of temporary accommodation options for young people in Group 3 aged 18 to 25 years old, who are deemed to be in priority need and who are eligible for temporary accommodation. These options were outlined in Section 2; these include temporary accommodation for specific groupings of young people e.g. Foyer provision and also generic temporary accommodation and services for those aged 18 and over. In addition, as noted in Section 2 non-standard accommodation in B&Bs, hotels and single lets are used. The discussion in the stakeholder interviews focussed on whether this range of services are sufficient and appropriate for young homeless people in Group 3.

Respondents noted concern about the high level of usage of non-standard temporary accommodation including B&Bs and single lets, and queried its suitability for vulnerable young people. One external respondent summed this up by noting: *Whilst this is putting a roof over their head, the environment is all wrong – putting them with people with addictions and the PSNI are there continuously.* (EXT)

One respondent expressed concern about the mix of people being placed in one B&B establishment. They noted: *An 18-year-old with mental health issues has fled from home. At the same time someone from a different District Office is placing an adult man with an alcohol history. It's far more likely that someone who has no support will end up there. And there's no staff on site. I don't think it's suitable – it's very stressful for staff and I do worry about people – but we have nowhere else to put them.* (INT)

External respondents made similar comments:

This is not an option. For the few young people who went in there, we find there are lots of other issues and most other people are alcoholics. For the young people put into this environment, I can't remember a good outcome. Especially because the young people are more complex, there's a level of learning disability and autism. These environments that they are being sent to, I would be advising strongly against it. (EXT)

They end up in hotels and B&Bs – in non-standard accommodation – and they are then stuck there. They need something more suitable – it shouldn't be like a stop gap and their motivation is zero. (EXT)

Equally respondents expressed concern about the appropriateness of some temporary hostel accommodation for vulnerable homeless young people.

Some young people refuse hostel accommodation. I find it very difficult, what I have to offer and the options are very limited. And in general, temporary accommodation is all I can offer. Sometimes I have to try and 'sell' it to the client. And in hostels people drink and break the rules – so they're not entirely wrong when they say they don't want to go. (INT)

A hostel is the worst place you can put a young person in to – makes it worse – they become heavily involved in drink and drugs, manipulated by older people – preyed on...just not suitable unless it is age

*specific – and there is none of these here in our HSC Trust area. Also if you do training or Tech – then you can't afford a hostel.*¹⁶⁵. (EXT)

Temporary accommodation hostels are not somewhere young people want to go. And you don't want 17- and 18-year-olds going there – living with men for example who have had problems for years and years. These are still very young adults that we have to protect. (EXT)

Respondents indicated that young people frequently indicate that they do not want to go to a hostel. One external respondent noted: *They prefer to walk the streets than go to a hostel.* (EXT)

There was also concern that once a young person was in a temporary accommodation hostel it would be difficult for them to get out of that situation. One external respondent said: *For some young people it ends up that they are caught in the hostel circuit – in and out of hostels and homelessness, and the sofa surfing cycle – it's very difficult to get out of.* (EXT)

In addition, a number of Housing Executive respondents referenced difficulties they had on an ongoing basis in relation to securing temporary accommodation for a young homeless person.

It's a shambles – we spend a couple of hours phoning every temporary accommodation provider in the province – we have to document that we've exhausted every possibility. But every hostel has different forms and processes – it's the biggest source of stress for staff. And there's no way of knowing if you're going to get a place. (INT)

Discussion on this area included references to the need for a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and tools (the implementation of the CAF form for generic hostels was noted) by which placing people in temporary accommodation could be more streamlined and less time-consuming. Some respondents felt that the current system was stacked against them.

I have a feeling that there is an element of gate-keeping of temporary accommodation as well. For certain hostels we have to go through the Belfast office – it's very frustrating for us outside of Belfast. And there are no hostels in our areas specifically for young people. (INT)

Feedback on accommodation which is more youth-focussed for this Group was mixed. There was concern that some provision, such as Foyers, require quite a high level of engagement, e.g. in education, training and employment and this is not suitable for all young people in this group. One external respondent noted: *It might be right for some young people but our young people are far too complex for it and there would be limited support for them.* (EXT) The Foyer model is looked at in more detail in Section 7; this outlines how providers have been changing the Foyer provision in response to this type of comment.

Overall, internal and external respondents raised concerns about the suitability of temporary accommodation both within hostel and specialist provision, as well as the use of non-standard

¹⁶⁵ Comment relates to interconnection between studying and eligibility for housing benefit, alongside fact that hostels have considerable service charges, which are costly for those not in receipt of housing benefit.

accommodation for young homeless people aged 18 to 25. The most significant concerns related to the nature of the accommodation, other client groups using the accommodation, the lack of support and the suitability of this range of accommodation for young people with more complex needs.

Theme 8 – Independent living skills and support for young people in Groups 2 and 3

5.21 The comments in this section are not dissimilar to the comments made earlier at paragraph 5.15 in relation to preparation for independent living for young people in Group 1 coming out of care. In this sub-section we examine feedback on independent living skills and support for young people in Group 2 (who may have returned home or may have been brought into the care system) and for young people in Group 3 who have been outside of the care system and any preparation for independent living. Analysis of the type and nature of these young people’s family and home backgrounds outlined earlier in this Section under reasons for homelessness and background factors (paragraph 5.4), suggests that these young people have had fairly limited opportunities to develop the key skills needed in order to live independently. Internal and external stakeholders suggested that young people in Groups 2 and 3 lacked key independent living skills in a number of areas. For the purposes of this analysis these are divided into groups of skills as outlined in Table 15.

Table 15: Development of key skills – Groups 2 and 3

Skill Area	Examples of skills	Quotes
Personal skills	Personal hygiene, self-confidence and self-esteem	<i>Many vulnerable young people lack confidence and resilience. (INT)</i>
Functional house-keeping skills	Shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, general maintenance of living space	<i>We show them how to use a heating timer, who to contact for what, how to change a light bulb – they are learning by doing when they move in. And through us being there and talking them through it. (EXT)</i>
Financial skills	Budgeting and financial planning, money management, paying bills, setting up payment methods	<i>On the whole it’s a big move in terms of practical steps – they haven’t got any experience from the past of budgeting or money management and they are not looking long-term ahead. Some kids need a lot of input – you need to work with them in the field (when they have a tenancy) – work with them where they are. (EXT)</i>
Social skills	Development of social network and community interaction	<i>Young people may not have an underlying network. The most vulnerable young people do not have support mattresses; that if things go wrong, they have someone to go to for help, compared to other young people leaving a family home who can go back for support including financial support. (INT)</i>

The following quote sums up what many respondents noted in relation to the level of tenancy readiness for many young people in Groups 2 and 3:

Being tenancy ready is so important and a lot of young people just don't have the life skills. Because of their mental health and use of drink and drugs they need to get support; they need Floating support. Being young and not knowing – and they have never been out of the house before – they don't know how to look after themselves and how to look after a tenancy. We do have starter packs – but more than that is needed. (INT)

External accommodation and service providers highlighted the work they do in this regard to make young people 'tenancy ready'. One respondent noted: *Our service covers a lot of budgeting, preparation for life skills, applications for housing and benefits and a lot of emotional support. (EXT)* An overarching concern was that young people in Group 2 in particular, who were placed in supported accommodation for a period of time, did not have a long enough period of time to ensure that they could develop sufficient independent living skills before moving on. This point was made earlier at paragraph 5.8. In addition, providers of supported accommodation noted that there can be difficulties and restrictions in how they encourage the development of the broad range of skills, not least the young person's attitude and willingness to engage. They also noted that staffing models and numbers can restrict what they would like to do. One provider said that they would like to do some of this in the community in terms of budgeting and shopping but because of lone-working arrangements *the staff member can't leave the project so can't take a group down to the shops to look at meal planning and budgets. (EXT)*

In addition, as well as commenting on the need for social skills on the part of the young person (see table 15), respondents referenced the need for wider informal and formal support, to enable young people to retain and sustain both their temporary accommodation placement and any move into permanent accommodation. One external respondent noted: *The most significant gap is emotional and social support. Loneliness – this leads to breakdown, they have no relationships with anyone – no parental relationship, no positive peer networks. (EXT)* This theme is touched on in the next subsection, and the provision of Floating support has been referenced in Section 2 and is looked at in more detail in Section 7.

Theme 9 – Permanent housing options for young people in Groups 1, 2 and 3

5.22 This theme, on the availability and suitability of permanent housing options for the young people in all three groups, permeated all of the interview responses. Some respondents noted that as a result of limited move-on or permanent housing options, and a lack of options at the point they are required, they felt that some temporary accommodation options for younger people, including for example supported accommodation and Foyer accommodation, was effectively bed-blocked. This had two effects; firstly on the individual who had no move-on option, but no longer needed the type and level of support provided in their current accommodation, and secondly in relation to a lack of access for other young people trying to secure temporary accommodation.

One respondent said: *There is nowhere to move on to – not enough points, don't want to live on their own and couldn't afford the private rented sector. And also in many cases they don't want to go into a flat share of people that they don't know. (INT)*

In terms of permanent accommodation, respondents suggested that the key factor was the lack of available and affordable accommodation options for young people, placed against their dependency on welfare benefits and limited access to additional or personal finance. The discussion covered two broad areas these being firstly, the length of waiting time for a social housing tenancy together with associated comments made about the suitability of any offer of accommodation, and secondly, the lack of access to the private rented sector and again its suitability and affordability.

Whilst much of the discussion was focussed on young people in Group 3 (aged 18 – 25), respondents also noted that some young people in Groups 1 and 2, were keen to move from temporary to permanent housing options, even before their length of time in supported accommodation or other settings e.g. GEMS had come to an end. One HSC Trust respondent said: *For these young people we work very hard to secure supported accommodation for them. But some want to move on at 18, they want a Housing Executive tenancy or to go into the private rented sector.* (EXT) It was acknowledged that this can work for some young people who are defined as a ‘child in need’. One respondent noted: *We have helped young people with deposits and a month’s rent in advance. At times landlords are negative – not always willing to have an 18-year-old in a tenancy. There are also factors in terms of a fairly high rental arrangement. The Leaving care policies allow us to support young people with deposits, rent in advance, top ups (when Housing Benefit doesn’t cover the assessed rent) and up to £2,500 for furnishings.* (EXT)

5.22.1 Social rented sector

Availability and affordability were the two main points noted by stakeholders. One external respondent said: *First of all there’s a lack of stock. If they’ve gone through the various services up to about the age of 21 or 22, that’s them more or less done, and then there’s nowhere for them to move to.* (EXT)

Social housing – it’s the sheer lack of availability – and there are a lot of single people who are eligible for a one-bedroom property – but whilst there’s lots of demand for these – there is a sheer lack of them. It’s getting a house that’s the issue. (INT)

Young people can’t afford even a Housing Executive tenancy on benefits – that is the reality for young people. (EXT)

Respondents highlighted the process of applying for social housing, the waiting list and times, and the points requirements for various areas of choice. External providers noted that they frequently help young people in their services to apply for social housing and to maximise their points. One respondent noted: *As soon as they turn 18, they register with the Housing Executive. This gets the ball rolling in terms of their areas of choice and points. We support them and we push, where we can we help to gather the points they need, providing a Social Work report. If they don’t have this type of thing then it’s a struggle with points – and takes a lot longer to get them.* (EXT)

Lack of stock and length of time waiting were two over-arching issues noted by a number of respondents. One external respondent summed this up by saying: *It’s a blessing that they (the Housing Executive) can build again, but we need one-bedroom flats that are dispersed in communities.*

Not a block for six people – all people with problems, party time for 17-year-olds. They need to have a chance to see what normality is. And the waiting time is an issue too. At 18 they can go to the Housing Executive, but then they have to wait another six months to get an extra 20 points. How are they meant to get somewhere? We need to look at what points are awarded to young people to get decent accommodation. (EXT) The length of time waiting for a social housing tenancy was also noted as having a negative impact on young people. *We can't really show them the light at the end of the tunnel. The list is fluid – they go up and down it dependent on who else has applied – and as others have higher priority.* (EXT)

For those young people who are able to access social housing, respondents from the Housing Executive talked about how the Patch Manager would work closely with them, with an overall aim of preventing any immediate or longer-term tenancy breakdown. *The Patch Manager would check if they have a starter pack and Floating Support. We need to get support to them if we are going to help them sustain a tenancy. The Patch Manager would do a viewing with them, help them with their rent card and how the rent works, talk to them about Housing Benefit and make sure they have applied for Universal Credit. The Patch Managers are very good at it.* (INT)

Respondents working in the HSC Trusts noted that they do support young people to apply for social housing from age 18 onwards, and that this is part of an overall leaving care pathway. They recognised that some young people prefer to exit support from the Trust at an earlier stage, but noted that the type, location and standard of social rented accommodation which is offered to young people can be problematic. One respondent said he had taken young people to view offers and noted: *There are often derelict buildings in the area, areas of high deprivation and we see broken windows. There can be issues of who they are located beside and then major partying either side of them.* This respondent summed up what positive attributes that accommodation should include. *The accommodation needs to be clean, comfortable, reasonable cost for heating, well-kept with a sense of community. Location near a bus route – so they can access training or employment.* (EXT) Another external respondent made a similar comment about the suitability of offers made to young people, in a rural setting where there is no or little transport. *You have to be practical, it's not just a question of putting a roof over their head. You're isolating them.* (EXT)

There was also a concern that the 'wrong' offer of accommodation could result in the young person losing their eligibility for social housing. One stakeholder noted: *I understand that this is because of their behaviours and anti-social behaviour but this is penalising a population which is very disadvantaged in terms of their background and their problems – and they just then move into a cycle of homelessness.* (EXT) Another said: *If they move too soon, they are not ready for a tenancy, and then the loss of their tenancy because of anti-social behaviour results in them being removed from the register and then loss of their housing points.* (EXT)

5.22.2 Private rented sector

Respondents noted that access to the private rented sector is largely unattainable for many young homeless people; citing factors relating to affordability, the need for a guarantor and the inter-play with private landlords who are unwilling to lease accommodation to certain categories of young people.

They fall between the gaps of affordability and the landlord – to get moved out of homelessness – that sphere is almost closed to young people. And Housing Benefit for under 35s you are talking the shared room rates. (INT)

The private rented sector is a no go – they can't afford it – no deposit, rent in advance. (EXT)

There was particular concern for young people who were care experienced, who were moving from supported accommodation into the private rented sector; a key factor relating to the absence of any support in this form of accommodation, albeit that Floating Support and other services can be attached to the young person. One respondent said: *The private landlords are charging an arm and a leg, and once the HSC Trust is not involved, then the tenancy is going to collapse. And then they will need temporary accommodation again at that point. (EXT)* Another HSC Trust respondent noted: *You are setting them up to fail. To give an example - Housing Benefit is at £79, and the rent is £100. First of all this shortfall is made up in the Discretionary payment (for care experienced young people) but when that stops, they can't afford it. They get it for a period of time but then it will disappear. They have to cover food, heating and electricity. And private landlords don't want to know young people. The 16 plus team have paid some deposits – it's worked for some of them and not for others. (EXT)*

As well as the many factors outlined above in relation to moving to permanent accommodation, respondents emphasised two further key elements. Firstly that the move will only work if the young person is ready to move on (see the discussion at theme 2, paragraph 5.15 and theme 8, paragraph 5.21) and secondly, if the young person has some form and level of support, be that informal (family and friends) or more formalised (Floating Support). External providers noted that there are good working relationships with the Housing Executive; with particular reference to a two-way discussion if one of the young people in their provision (Groups 1 and 2) are made an offer of social housing. One respondent outlined the process as follows: *They register, are picking their areas of choice and they get their priority need or FDA status. We start this process when they come to us and help them to think about their housing. But it can happen very quickly – they get an offer – but they are nowhere near ready to go. We 'hold them' and work together with the Housing Executive. (EXT)*

Respondents made positive comments about various schemes and pilot projects aimed at minimising or opening up the entry barriers into both the tenures discussed. These included rent deposit and guarantee schemes and shared tenancy projects. Discussion on these is covered in detail in Section 7.

5.23 There was universal consensus on the negative impact of homelessness on young people across the different stakeholder groups. This analysis draws out the main themes for this sub-section, and these are outlined in Table 16 providing a summary of the impact and associated quotes from the interviews.

The four main areas of impact for young homeless people were identified as follows:

- Sense of abandonment
- Deterioration in mental health and decreased self-confidence and self-esteem
- Lack of hope and stability
- Missed opportunities

It is recognised that there is overlap between these identified impacts.

Table 16: Impact of homelessness on young people

Impact on young people	Quotes
<p>Sense of abandonment – respondents noted that the young people they have interacted with, who are homeless, often display feelings of being demoralised and alone.</p>	<p><i>For young people the homelessness – it really does compound it – that sense of abandonment, that there’s no-one to look after me, you are in the interview room with them – they get very childlike and it’s heart-breaking. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>It has demoralised them – a lot of young people just want somewhere that is their own – their own front door – where they can feel safe and secure and feel they belong. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>Psychologically it’s not helping – they don’t have the comfort blanket or security that we find in family – and a lot of us take for granted. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>They feel useless and their self-esteem drops and their confidence. And they are in isolation. (EXT)</i></p>
<p>Deterioration in mental health and decreased self-confidence and self-esteem – respondents referenced associated deterioration in mental health and self-esteem with youth homelessness.</p>	<p><i>For 100% of the young people there are mental health issues – 100% of them are on some sort of medication for anxiety and depression – from low to high doses. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>The impact on their mental health and well-being – they can become very isolated and alone. Their cries for help are not really recognised or dealt with collectively by statutory services – we need better systems in order to safeguard children. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>They can’t cope any more – they are more and more socially isolated. (EXT)</i></p>

Impact on young people	Quotes
<p>Lack of hope and stability – respondents noted a lack of stability and feelings of hope for young people in this situation.</p>	<p><i>When they know they are going to be on a waiting list – well, it doesn't provide any stability. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>For young people their prospects are very, very low – they don't have jobs or support of their family – they don't hit priority need – not much I can do. (INT)</i></p> <p><i>The impact on their health and stability – being in a hostel with other adults who are a lot older – drink and drugs – the environment is very unstable. (INT)</i></p>
<p>Missed opportunities - Respondents also noted the missed opportunities both in responding to young homeless people at an appropriate stage and in the most relevant way, and then missed opportunities for the young people in terms of their access to what other young people can access e.g., education, training and employment.</p>	<p><i>The consequences – it sets them on a course – dictates the remainder of their youth and into adulthood. We see it from an operational point of view – young person who hasn't engaged and then by the time they get to 35 they're actually looking and acting 60. Life has passed them by – they don't have settled accommodation or the life skills to engage appropriately, they have no resources to get or keep a job, or to hold down a proper or long-term relationship; the opportunity to have children – and if they have – to keep the child. Every one of them are in care – sense of guilt, longing and loss. (INT)</i></p>

Many of the above factors were summed up by one Housing Advisor in their response:

The impact on their mental health is a big one – they turn to alcohol and drugs to blank things out – and they are robbing and stealing. They feel they have nobody – and no support – their family doesn't want to know. They feel so depressed and down. They take it (drink or drugs) and then it becomes every day – to help numb the pain. (INT)

Another Housing Executive member of staff put it like this, again pointing to the complexity of the situation and emphasising the need to focus on both prevention and early intervention if a young person presents as homeless.

Once you get into the cycle of homelessness and all the problems that come with it – mental health and addictions – it's very difficult to break that cycle – and young people can move into chronic homelessness. A lot of the cases on our books are from when the person first presented as a young person. The evidence is there – this is what happens – we need to get in early. (INT)

This theme of early intervention was confirmed by another Housing Executive representative, focussing on the need to provide suitable accommodation as soon as possible in order to mitigate against negative impacts.

If you can get them into supported living when they first present – because the longer it goes on it has a detrimental effect on them – their mental health and ability to form relationships – it's not ideal. (INT)

One external provider respondent summed up the key themes highlighted above in terms of impact of homelessness on young people as follows:

Young people are running flat out just to stand still. They have a little move forward and then something happens and it's a set back and a move back. This can be because of trauma and triggers of the memory of that. Their mood gets low, their self-esteem goes and their confidence decreases. (EXT)

They don't want to engage – and at times if they have engaged before and it hasn't worked out for them – it's difficult then to get them to engage....they can't see where they are going. They need a boost in terms of what they can do. (EXT)

A number of external provider respondents (provider organisations) talked about very final impacts for some young homeless people. One respondent noted that a number of young people he had worked with had *ended up with tragic ends – they had progressed through different types of drugs and in the end they died.* Another respondent said that the impact of youth homelessness *can often be fatal. I often tell the staff that the work we do is 'saving lives' – in order for young people to feel their worth. We need to work in such a way that their worth is reflected back to them so that they feel valued.* (EXT)

A further provider respondent highlighted the impact of multiple moves on young people as follows: *When you see young people who have had multiple moves. Then they don't really connect – nothing has any value to them. They place a low level of value or no value on themselves. We have often said – how many of these young people make it to their 30s? In a recent team meeting we counted 14 young people who didn't make it to adulthood – and this would be the story across the board.... How many haven't made it because of misadventure or through taking their own life? It's time for a shake-up.* (EXT)

Similar conclusions were drawn by HSC Trust representatives. One respondent summed up the impact on young people as follows:

They are in a stuck place – they haven't been able to resolve their issues – and those issues then continue into their adult trajectory. It has an impact on their health, well-being and on society. They don't get the opportunities that other young people get. They are not content and happy. (EXT)

Another HSC Trust respondent said the following:

The impact on young people is quite profound – it is taking away their life opportunities. It's only when they are in settled accommodation that they can make strides in other parts of their lives – such as education and training. For some young people it ends up that they are caught in the hostel circuit – in and out of hostels and homelessness – it's very difficult to get out of. And it has a profound impact on them in terms of how they view themselves – it's very difficult for them to improve their lives. (EXT)

SECTION 6 RESEARCH FINDINGS – FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

Introduction

6.1 This section provides an analysis of the feedback from young people experiencing homelessness. A total of 29 young people¹⁶⁶ aged 16 – 25 years old participated in the semi-structured interviews, which took place in May and June 2021 through a range of mechanisms including phone, Zoom and face-to-face interviews. Quotes from respondents are provided throughout in *italics*.

6.2 Thanks are due to the young people who participated and provided their lived experience and insight into their journey into homelessness and their current situation. A number of providers and organisations helped to facilitate the interviews; these comprised Strand Foyer and Flax Foyer, generic Simon Community hostels for those aged 18 plus (in Armagh, Belfast, Ballymena, Coleraine and Lisburn), young people’s accommodation projects provided by Simon Community (Malone Foyer) and their Floating Support service, Lisburn YMCA, the Lighthouse hostel in Ballymena, First Housing projects including Jefferson Court in Derry and their Floating Support Service, Housing Rights (YPHAMS¹⁶⁷ project), Shelter NI through their SLATE project in Omagh, Belfast Central Mission’s Joint Commissioned projects at Riverside in Bangor and at Tafelta Rise in Magherafelt, and various MACs projects including their Floating Support Service (in Belfast, Lisburn and Downpatrick) and the shared tenancy project, as well as clients living in single lets identified by the Belfast Housing Solutions team and the private rented sector identified by Action for Children NI.

6.3 Similar to Section 5 the analysis of this primary fieldwork has provided key findings around working to both prevent and respond to youth homelessness; these have been organised thematically in line with the research objectives as follows:

Theme	Research objective
Theme 1 – Nature of youth homelessness	Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16 – 25 in Northern Ireland. (Objective 1)
Theme 2 – Preventing youth homelessness	Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people. (Objective 2)
Theme 3 – Challenges in service delivery – accommodation and support	Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing ‘move on’ options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready. (Objective 3)
Theme 4 – Challenges in inter-agency working	Identification and exploration of the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions. (Objective 5)

¹⁶⁶ Against a target of 30 interviews.

¹⁶⁷ YPHAMS – Young Persons Housing Advocacy and Mediation service.

Key Findings 1 - The nature of youth homelessness

6.4 This sub-section examines young people's views, based on their lived experience, of youth homelessness in Northern Ireland, looking in particular at how and when they became homeless including reasons for homelessness, background issues and triggers and pathways into youth homelessness. In addition, this sub-section examines how homelessness has impacted them. This sub-section covers the research objective - *Analysis of the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16 – 25 in Northern Ireland.*

Age of respondents

6.5 Table 17 provides a breakdown of the age of respondents indicating a spread across the age range 17 – 25 years, with no 16-year-old respondents and the most respondents (16 out of 29) aged 18, 19 and 20 years old. There were 14 female respondents and 15 males; gender distribution is also noted in Table 17.

Table 17: Age of respondents

Age	Number of respondents	Female respondents	Male respondents
16	0	0	0
17	2	1	1
18	5	3	2
19	7	4	3
20	4	2	2
21	1	0	1
22	2	1	1
23	1	0	1
24	2	0	2
25	5	2	3
Total	29	14	15

Reasons for youth homelessness

6.6 Analysis of the reasons for entry into homelessness indicated that these were often complex and multiple, involving relationship breakdown with parents, family or partner. In many cases they were not caused by one single incident but a build-up or series of events. This is illustrated by the following comment: *I'd say it was family breakdown. I moved out of my home at 16. It was a build of things. Mum and Dad got divorced. Mum was very bad on alcohol and drugs. I had to do everything for my two brothers. I had to take on her responsibility and I was still at school. Then I noticed that it was not normal. I was doing my GCSEs and it was far too much.*

6.7 Family relationship breakdown was a central theme, featured as the sole or partial reason for homelessness in 24 of the 29 cases examined. Relationship breakdown or fallout with parents (and step-parents) also seemed to go hand in hand with deeper difficulties within the family home. This included respondents noting factors such as a lack of family support, that because of overcrowding there was no real space for them in the family home and in some cases that their own behaviour had

resulted in a difference of opinion with their parents. Falling out with parents was summed up by one respondent: *I was just not getting on with my parents. I think you get to a certain age and you are too close to them all the time. There were rows and arguing.*

Whilst this confirms what we know already about the interconnection between youth homelessness and relationship breakdown, it points to the continued need to focus on preventative approaches, to prevent family or relationship breakdown, as a mechanism to reduce the level and incidence of youth homelessness.

6.8 Overcrowding was highlighted as the causal reason for family breakdown in four cases; put simply that there was insufficient room in some homes, in particular where young adults had formed their own relationships and/or had children, and were still living in the family home. *Living at home me and my Mummy wouldn't get on. The relationship was very bad. There was Mum and Dad and 8 of us in total – brothers and sisters – living in a 3-bedroom house. There was a lot of shouting and arguing. We just bumped heads; the relationship is better now.* Another respondent noted: *Mum moved house and there was literally only room for her and my wee sister. It only had two bedrooms. I slept on the couch at Mum's. I just didn't have any privacy. I had no private space and there was no choice but to go.* A further respondent who was eight months pregnant said: *The house was quite overcrowded. There's my Mum and Dad, and my brother and sister and their partners. All in a four-bedroom house. I just had a box room and there wasn't even space to put any of the stuff for the baby.* In terms of behaviour, one respondent said: *Me and my Daddy didn't have a good relationship. I was coming in off my head but my Dad was against me. And they got a non-molestation order against me.* This respondent said he had got involved in drugs during 2019 and then *once lockdown hit everyone was doing it. And then I started getting into trouble.*

6.9 In a small number of cases it was breakdown between siblings (including step-siblings) or wider family members. One respondent noted that his mother had moved out of the family home to live with a partner, leaving him and two brothers to live together. One brother moved out quite quickly, and then the respondent and his older brother did not get on. He said: *It was all in his name and he said I want you out. You don't really expect to be thrown out. It hasn't been fun. There was arguments about money and my brother was a party animal.* A similar theme was highlighted by another respondent who had been living at his brother's house for about a year. He said: *He threw me out of the house. I paid my part in terms of food and just lived on the sofa. It came out of the blue but he gave me 20 days to get out. He wanted his house back.*

6.10 In a number of cases the reason for fractures in the family setting had been quite specific. One young male respondent noted that this stemmed back to his parent's disapproval of his sexual orientation, in particular his father's unwillingness to accept this. This respondent said: *I was kicked out of my parents' house because of my sexual orientation. At home Dad is deeply Catholic and Mum is not so religious – it was tearing the family apart. And I was sharing with my younger brother but we never got along – Dad wanted me gone.* Another male respondent with a diagnosis on the Autistic spectrum noted: *Me and my family had quite a bit of a rocky relationship. After sitting some school exams he said: My mood turned aggressive. I didn't know how to express myself. Me and my Mother's relationship deteriorated. It was better for me to step out of the picture.*

6.11 In a small number of cases, particularly with young people at the higher part of the age category (ages 24 and 25) there had been a breakdown of a relationship. One respondent said: *My ex-partner had an affair with my best friend. It was going on for two months, and that was the end of the relationship. We had been in a private rental for four months but it was in his name and I had limited rights.* Another respondent said: *Basically I was living with my partner at that time. Then me and the partner broke up and he moved out. And then I was unable to afford the rent*

6.12 A number of respondents indicated that prior to becoming homeless they had been in the care system, and they viewed this as being one of the key factors in their reason for homelessness. One female respondent outlined multiple and ongoing fallouts with her foster parents. Another respondent talked about going into foster care when he was 14 years old because of a whole range of things happening in his life and his parent's separation. In this case, the respondent felt his homelessness was a combination of a range and multitude of factors including those listed below under background issues and triggers; from drug use, offending and time in prison, Social Services involvement in his life and household etc. Another respondent highlighted behaviour as the key factor for coming into care and then into homelessness; she noted: *My Mummy couldn't deal with me and my behaviour. Social workers put me into B&Bs and then into a hostel.* A similar theme was noted by another respondent. He said: *me and my foster parents had a disagreement over Covid-19, it was about what time to come in by. So I left aged 17 and 10 months. I was in three B&Bs for three months.* Covid-19 was a factor in a small number of the cases analysed. One respondent said: *Mum told me to leave the house right at the start of lockdown. Me and Mum never got on. It was very stressful and we clashed heads. She asked me to leave.*

Background issues and triggers

6.13 A number of background issues and triggers or risk factors were noted by young respondents, in the discussion about how they had become homeless. These are outlined in table 18. It should be noted that these issues were highlighted in response to open questions about background factors; many of these fall under the heading of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). There may be a level of under-counting of background issues, if these were not specifically noted by any respondent. Focussing services and support for these issues and triggers may help in reducing the incidence of youth homelessness.

Table 18: – Youth homelessness: Background issues and triggers

Background issue/trigger	Number of respondents
Social Services involvement	14
Poor mental health	9
Parents separated or divorced, involvement of step parent	8
Drugs/alcohol – young person	7
Offending history/involvement with PSNI	7
Multiple moves as a child/time in hostel	7
Drugs/alcohol – parents	6
Experienced abuse	6
Custodial sentence – prison or YOC	3
Child (but no access to them)	3
Expelled or disrupted education	2
Death of parent or sibling	2
Lack of support for LGBTQI ¹⁶⁸ identity	1

6.14 High proportions of the respondents noted Social Services involvement in their early life, together with factors such as poor mental health, divorced or separated parents or the involvement of step-parents, use of or dependency on alcohol and drugs, an offending history and multiple moves as a child, including time in hostels. These factors are illustrated by the following comments:

After I got put out of school, I had a lot more time running about. I was being introduced to different sorts of drugs. This was when I was about 14 or 15.

I was in a family hostel with my Mummy for four years.

6.15 About one fifth (6) of respondents had experienced abuse and/or had parents with a drugs or alcohol addiction. In addition, it was noted that use of drugs or the impact of a drug habit also impacted family relationships leading ultimately to homelessness for the young person. This was noted as a background issue/trigger by seven young people in terms of their own drug usage, and by six respondents in relation to parental drug use. However, drug usage was clearly not a universal issue for all respondents. One respondent said: *Drugs were my coping mechanism, mostly MDMA in rock or powder form. When I was on it, I was happy. It was unhealthy to be at my Mum's with my sisters. She had no choice but to throw me out. They are all younger and it was causing rows. I would be out and then come back to the house in a bad mood and bad state and this would cause arguments. Not nice for the girls.*

In another case the reason was linked to the young person's drug habit. He said: *I got kicked out of Mum's about five days before Christmas. I have a drug debt and they were at the door. I came home one evening and the doors were all locked and my clothes were in bin bags.* A further respondent

¹⁶⁸ LGBTQI - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), and intersex.

highlighted a similar pattern; he said: *It was a drugs problem. The relationship with Mum and Dad broke down and I was asked to leave. I was too out of it. I got involved in drugs at 14 or 15. Everyone was doing it so I was doing it too.*

6.16 Whilst much smaller numbers had experienced some factors – been in prison or a Young Offenders Centre (3), had a child for whom they had no contact or access (3), had been expelled from school or had a disrupted education (2), or had a parent or sibling who died (2) – nevertheless these were important background factors in some respondents lives, feeding into their pathway into homelessness. Respondents made the following comments:

Mum and Dad used to fight all the time. And she was beaten by Dad if she said anything. Then they separated and Dad had a new family. He was more focussed on them. Then Mum got a new partner and other children and didn't really spend time with me. This led to my depression.

I did all my GCSE's – I did like eight of them. But then I was finding things difficult and trying to get through the classes. Then I started messing about and the police had to talk to me.

Dad was an alcoholic and Mum was a borderline alcoholic. They had a tendency to disappear for a while and also attempted suicide

My Mum is addicted to drugs, since I was about 12. And this has triggered a lot of this. My Dad died when I was 15 years old.

6.17 Whilst not a trigger or background factor per se, interestingly a high proportion of young people interviewed said they had completed education/school up to the age of 16 (14 respondents), and quite a number indicated that they had completed GCSEs (10 respondents) and in some cases A levels (four respondents). In addition, respondents mentioned being at or hoping to go to college and in a couple of cases to university. It was clear that this sample of young people had the ability to achieve academically, but in many cases their education was cut short or disrupted. In contrast some young people noted poor school attendance and had no qualifications.

One respondent noted that he had finished school and got an apprenticeship, but was then *kicked out of Tech because of drugs*. Whilst another respondent said that he had gone to University and got a degree in youth work; he was then working and living with his partner, with homelessness caused by relationship breakdown, a loss of employment and anxiety. A further respondent said: *I kept going to school, did my GCSEs, started my A levels and then dropped out. It got too much for me and I just left*. Another respondent said she had completed her education through the encouragement of the staff at the supported accommodation project she was living in. She said: *It took a lot of encouragement but they were adamant that I completed them and they helped me. I want to make something of myself*.

Pathways into youth homelessness

6.18 The young people described their varied pathways into youth homelessness. Whilst these largely related to their reason for homelessness and/or other background issues e.g. coming from a care setting, asked to leave the family home, there were some specific trends which are worth noting. Firstly, seven young people (two female and five males) indicated that they did not go immediately to statutory services and delayed seeking any help from either the Housing Executive or Social Services. This was mainly related to their age when they became homeless, their chaotic lifestyle or they simply did not know where to seek help or how to do this in terms of skills and capacity. In short, these respondents said they had not felt able or had the confidence to approach statutory services. Secondly, a large number of the respondents (19 of the 29 young people) indicated a pattern of steps or bouncing between locations. Examples included moving between where Mum and Dad live, sofa surfing with friends, sofa surfing with relatives. The impact of this was a lack of consistency over time, short term arrangements which often did not last long, no private space (very often in the living room – no separate bedroom), and having nowhere to store their stuff. Similar to the previous point, nine young people who had previously left home or been asked to leave home, then returned or bounced back home for a while. One respondent commented: *I was 18. I thought I could do anything and beat the world. Then I was living with my brother for a while and then I went back home, but it still didn't work out.*

6.19 It was clear from the qualitative comments that the pathway into youth homelessness, often included multiple and repetitive moves around a circuit of potential places to stay, had a significant impact on the young person's education, training and employment. One respondent noted: *I was jumping from house to house, staying with friends. I usually slept on a sofa, staying at my ex-boyfriend's, sleeping in a park. I lost count of the number of times. I had no food, no nothing. It wasn't really my Mum's fault; it was my fault. Mum tried to guide me down a path but I wanted to lead my own life and I chose drugs.* Another respondent said: *I ended up with the wrong crowd of people. I thought they were my friends but they weren't. I was in about 10 households at one point over a couple of weeks.*

6.20 The discussion of pathways into youth homelessness also resulted in respondents talking about the fact they had no fixed place to call home and a lack of stability, security and privacy. The transient nature of their existence can be illustrated as follows. One respondent noted: *I was on the streets for a few weeks. This was the most stressful portion of all of this. I didn't sleep for weeks on end, it was terrible. I wandered and tried to find a bench. I eventually got in touch with friends and they put me up for a month or two.* Another respondent said: *I slept rough for about one month. I was just walking about. Then I got a B&B in Derry. It was alright; at least it was a roof over my head and a bed to sleep in.* A further respondent described how she felt moving between different places. She said: *I didn't have a safe space to go to or a room. I did have a roof over my head....but not having a home.*

The impact of youth homelessness

6.21 The young respondents were asked about the impact homelessness and their homeless journey had had on them. Probes included asking about their physical health, their mental health, their self-confidence and self-worth and the options and opportunities available to them. Table 19 indicates the incidence and nature of responses when probed about specific types of impact, indicating that youth homelessness had a massive impact on these young people both in terms of their immediate needs and situation, and potentially in relation to life chances and opportunities.

Table 19: Analysis of the impact of youth homelessness

Type of impact and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
Physical health - 11	<p>A number of respondents indicated that their homelessness had an impact on their ability to feed themselves and their eating patterns. One respondent said: <i>I didn't eat right</i>. Another respondent said: <i>I've not been eating properly – I lost a load of weight and this had an impact on me and my clothes didn't fit – there is food provided here by a chef, but it's just not for me – I like making my own food. But it's all good now that I'm in the flat here</i>. A further respondent said: <i>I dropped a lot of weight because I was walking all the time and not eating much</i>. One respondent said that homelessness had a very big impact on his physical and mental health, resulting in his weight dropping from 10 ½ to 7 ½ stone. Another said that a 2-year stay in temporary accommodation had an impact on his physical health in the shape of a stomach ulcer. A small number suggested that their physical health had deteriorated but noted that this was connected to Covid-19, rather than homelessness per se.</p>
Mental health - 21	<p>Respondents described the impact on their mental health using a range of terms – depression, anxiety, stress – all linked to factors including uncertainty about their future and where they will live, worry about having nowhere and being on the streets etc.</p> <p><i>I hate it; when I move again, I want to be done with moving. I've been moving around too much. I don't want to go through that again – it's so stressful. I think about it (not having permanent accommodation) every day and I am anxious about being out on the streets and the uncertainty.</i></p> <p><i>I had depression and anxiety and there were suicide attempts. I had to leave school and I wasn't getting out of bed, I felt so low. It was a really tough time, and it still affects me now.</i></p> <p><i>Mainly my mental health. Before I got kicked out, I had depression and anxiety. Whenever I got kicked out it got progressively worse. I tried to kill myself five or six times, a lot of self-harm and sometimes still. It did have a big impact. This respondent did receive help whilst in supported accommodation and now has a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder. She said: it's extremely hard to get that help. It was a very long waiting list. I felt the professionals don't care unless you are going to kill yourself, before they do something.</i></p> <p>Respondents noted disrupted sleep patterns. <i>It wasn't easy. When I first moved in here, I didn't sleep for two weeks. I'm a bit more used to it and can manage it better. I was very depressed at a point, and on and off medication for two years. I'm currently off it and doing a bit better. But I was at a low point.</i> Another respondent said: <i>I would say it's made me a</i></p>

Type of impact and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
	<p><i>bit more anxious and harder to sleep at night time. Individuals knocking on your door at 4.30 am, makes you anxious.</i></p> <p>The impact on mental health was summed up by one respondent: <i>yes, my emotions – I’ve been very angry and cry a lot. But it was improving because I had friends here, but it was hard not to see family. My mental health is not the best but I’m getting there, I’m trying to get there.</i></p> <p>Another respondent said: <i>Since January my mental health has took a drop. What happened was losing access to my dog and having to move into a hostel. I was isolated from family and friends. And I was witnessing a few things here. It took a big dip. I was on depression tablets.</i></p> <p>Some respondents said that their homeless situation had led to a decline in their mental health, and this led to them isolating from others. <i>I don’t like leaving the flat anymore. I’m in my own space and not interacting.</i></p>
Self-confidence and self-worth - 8	<p>Respondents made the following comments:</p> <p><i>It’s had an impact on my self-confidence and self-worth – it makes me feel am I not good enough to get my own wee place? Should I just stop trying?</i></p> <p><i>I was doubting myself...but now I have found myself again. The staff helped and friends. At the start I was confused, frustrated and scared. I didn’t know where I was heading. All the moving around and I wasn’t feeling safe – now that I’m here, I feel safe.</i></p> <p><i>Self-worth was a big one...I feel like I’m not good enough for other people – like a black sheep. It’s a wee bit embarrassing with your mates.</i></p> <p>In a small number of cases, respondents said that their current living situation and services received had a positive impact on their self-confidence and self-worth. One respondent said: <i>This place has helped with my self-worth. I didn’t think much of myself when I first got here. Now I’m trying to better myself. All the staff are delightful.</i> Another said: <i>you’re not the same person...it changes you. It hardens you.</i></p>
Options and opportunities - 8	<p>One respondent noted that the homeless situation had an impact on her training. <i>I kept Rutledge¹⁶⁹ going for a while – then I stopped doing it, my mental health wasn’t great.</i> Another respondent said: <i>I kinda stopped focusing on the positives and on my education because I was more worried about where I was going to live.</i> A further respondent said: <i>I dropped out of school and lost all motivation to do anything. I just didn’t go in. This was a result of having no accommodation.</i></p> <p>Conversely a small number of respondents said that their current living situation, as a result of being homeless, had resulted in more and better options and opportunities for them. One respondent noted: <i>Moving takes too much time. I’m now settled and will look for things now (training and jobs were discussed).</i> Another respondent said: <i>Yeah, but it’s good and positive</i></p>

¹⁶⁹ Rutledge Recruitment & Training Belfast

Type of impact and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
	<i>here, I feel so much better and happier. There has been no impact on my options – it doesn't stop you from anything.</i>

6.22 Analysis of the young people’s responses indicate the following overarching findings. These demonstrated similarities to the impacts identified by key stakeholders, in particular around mental health, decreased self-confidence and self-esteem and missed opportunities.

- The impact of youth homelessness was universal. All 29 respondents noted some type and level of negative impact ranging from minor items to significant impacts on their physical and mental health. There was evidence that none of the young people interviewed had avoided a negative impact on their lives; this universal negative impact needs to be acknowledged and taken into account in planning preventative strategies. The unanswered question for all of the young people centred on how this period of time and the situation of being homeless would impact their life in the longer term and translate into a potential negative result in their life chances and opportunities;
- The impact on mental health as indicated by young homeless people was significant and affected nearly three quarters of respondents; 21 out of the 29 respondents (72%), with lower impacts noted for physical health, 11 out of 29 respondents (38%), and on self-confidence/self-worth and options/opportunities – 8 out of 29 respondents (28%);
- It was clear from the qualitative quotes that homelessness had a knock-on effect on a number of different aspects of the young people’s lives. This included ability to sustain a job, keeping in touch with family and friends, and capacity to sustain education and training;
- Youth homelessness was one factor in the young people’s lives, resulting in negative impacts. However, it was also clear that for many of these respondents there were other wider background factors, some of which had been contributory in causing the homelessness, which also fed into their current health status and their overall well-being. One respondent said: *I have always had no self-confidence or self-esteem. They have never been good. I never went anywhere or did anything;*

6.23 A final clear conclusion in relation to impact was the fact that getting settled accommodation, even if this was temporary or transient in nature, invariably led to and was linked to some or considerable positive impact and an improvement in many of the areas discussed below, e.g. physical health, stability etc. Improvements in mental health were clear in many but not all cases, and for many young people this appeared to continue to be a difficulty. This finding is illustrated as follows: *Whenever I’m living between houses – I’m always skint – and really underweight. I didn’t really have any food and I got very thin. Now that I’m in the hostel I have something to eat – there’s never been a point where I had nothing. My appetite wasn’t there before.*

Another respondent noted: *I’m now getting back up on my feet. They’re doing me well, keeping me positive. All that moving about, stressed me out and I was depressed and had anxiety through that –*

not knowing where I was going to stay. Now I feel far better about myself. A further respondent talked about how it had been a shock to their system, but that they were gradually starting to sort out their life as well as accommodation. *There's no chance to ease into it, bang and you're homeless. And then you're on your own. Having to do everything, it does give you a bit of independence, and I think I'm coping fairly well. Had to grow up at a young age.*

6.24 A number of respondents talked about how current accommodation and support (during their homeless period) had helped them. One respondent said: *But moving in here, my mental health is surprisingly well – I am better. The situation is so much better. I am well enough off now and there's no stress.*

6.25 The following quote sums up the multiple and interconnected impacts on one respondent, who referenced a number of stays in generic hostels:

I was really below weight. I literally had no money and I was scared in the hostels. I didn't eat for ages; I lost a lot of weight. And then when you are in hostels you end up turning to drugs and it messes with your mental health. My weight is still a struggle, learning how to cook, I was never really taught. There was nothing in the Children's home about this, you were not allowed into the kitchen, they had to get everything for you. When you are homeless you can't really do anything. When you live in a hostel and have that address, everyone looks at you as if you are some sort of a druggie. I found this even when I was ordering a taxi. Now (no longer homeless) you can do more things.

Key Findings 2 - Preventing youth homelessness

6.26 The importance of preventing homelessness has already been noted in Sections 2 and 3 of this report, and was examined from a stakeholder perspective in Section 5. Young people were asked to indicate what they thought could have been done to prevent them becoming homeless in the first place. This very personal examination of their own situation included asking what sort of things could have helped them in their childhood or family home setting, and what other type of support may have been useful at an earlier age or stage. Responses in this part of the interview again showed mature insight by the young people reflecting on their own homeless experience, as well as an ability to extrapolate that more generally for other young people in similar circumstances. In particular they noted what could have been done better and what they thought could make a real difference.

This sub-section covers the research objective - *Examination of the most effective homelessness prevention initiatives being employed for young people.* The following analysis firstly examines what young people felt could have prevented their own situation, and secondly what they suggested should be put in place more widely in order to prevent youth homelessness.

Reflection on what would have prevented their youth homelessness

6.27 A number of respondents said that in their case youth homelessness could not have been prevented. They noted various reasons for this; one respondent said: *nothing really to prevent or stop the breakdown and the way the path went.*

6.28 Twelve respondents (41%) said they did feel more could have been done to prevent homelessness in their particular situation. This is an important part of the feedback from young

people based on their own experience, and as illustrated in the following examples could have included interventions in their early family life and their teenage years, and in many cases through quite small changes. In addition, it illustrates that many of the risk factors and reasons for homelessness emerge in the young person's early life, far in advance of their homeless situation, suggesting that this is less of a housing issue and more of a social or wider societal issue. The discussion below points in particular to the need for communication and mechanisms to keep family relations open and strong, as being essential factors.

6.29 In three cases, respondents felt their parents (or foster parents) or wider family could have listened to them or worked with them prior to them leaving home or being asked to leave the home. One respondent said *If my foster parents had listened to me more and my feelings. I didn't feel valued and I had to get up and go.* This respondent said some form of mediation would have helped, at this point. She went on to explain that she had been in foster care from the age of four, and when this broke down in her late teens, she felt the situation had left her effectively with no-one to turn to, although her foster parents had continued to reach out and try to provide some level of support. *I was always falling out with my foster parents. I couldn't deal with living with them anymore, there were a lot of fall outs. I was the only girl and they really protected me. And then there was a lot of change going on. I felt I was not good enough for them and I felt they didn't listen to me and I had enough.*

6.30 A number of respondents pointed to different aspects of family life which had led to poor communication and a breakdown in family relationships. This included family separation and divorce; one respondent said: *Mum and Dad breaking up was a big thing in my life – it affected me a lot.* He thought more support at this point would have been helpful.

6.31 Three respondents mentioned family mediation. One said that it would have been good to have some level of input so that he could have maintained better relationships at home. In response to the suggestion of mediation he said: *that would have helped to prevent a lot – but how would it be delivered? And how would people know about it? I don't know if it would have helped. My brother and I do speak now but we're very different and there's not much leeway.* One respondent thought family mediation would have worked in his case, but it was only mentioned when he moved into temporary accommodation, and he felt this was too late at this point.

6.32 One respondent, who previously had Social Services support, felt this should have continued in her case, and this would have been a factor in preventing her homelessness. She said: *if the right support was there, this would have prevented it in my case. If the social workers had stayed, I wouldn't have been where I am.* A further respondent felt that the support she received from Social Services had not helped to prevent her homelessness. She said: *there were a lot more opportunities where things could have been done.* She explained that when it was coming up to her leaving home there were limited opportunities, and that in her opinion: *I would have been better with a foster family.* She also indicated that whilst she had been offered an assessment bed twice, at ages 16 and 17, this had not been the right option for her. Overall this respondent said she felt that the social workers involved in her case had not taken the responsibility that they should have; she said: *I was basically told to go and sleep on the streets.*

6.33 Another respondent also recognised the importance of support. She said that breakdown of the family home could have been prevented if her Mum had been encouraged to receive support. She said: *It was my Mum. If she could have went to a drug support network that would have helped me.*

6.34 Three respondents suggested that in their cases, there should have been more intervention in their early teens, in particular via schools and youth settings, and in relation to drug use, mental health and ensuring that young people were more positively occupied. One respondent said: *I was running about with other young people and they were bad influences and I got involved in spice and things. I did go to youth clubs and things but got put off.* Schools were specifically highlighted by four respondents. One respondent said that there should be more emotional counselling in schools, and another said: *school could have treated me different. I was going through a lot at home, I was a troubled child, but I didn't feel encouraged.* This respondent thought more could be done in terms of pastoral input. A further respondent said that more could have been done to support him at school. He noted: *if they had provided me with support – they saw me struggle and left me to it.* In short, school and youth settings, as providers of support and help, were fairly high up on the list of 'go to places' amongst many of the young people. Perhaps this was because their family setting was not (and had not been) a good place of support for them, and the route of having support from a family for the transition from childhood to adulthood was not an option.

6.35 One respondent felt that her homeless situation could have been prevented if she had been given a tenancy at *an early stage* so that she did not have to go into hostels. Three respondents highlighted specific issues in relation to overcrowding in their home family situation, which had resulted in or contributed to them becoming homeless. One respondent said there had been six in his family home and with his Mum and Dad and three brothers there had been severe overcrowding. He felt his homelessness could have been prevented if a larger house had been available for the family. He said: *both Mum and Dad have very poor mental health. This is the impact of the overcrowding, there are tensions running the whole time. Housing (the Housing Executive) should have looked at that, it was very cramped and there was no space – and you never had your own space. They were very small rooms – it was a recipe for disaster.* Another respondent explained that his homelessness effectively started because his Mum had been on the transfer list for 10 years. When the Mum was eventually offered a bungalow, it only had two bedrooms, for his Mum and his younger sister. The participant ended up staying on the sofa for six months and then moved into a hostel.

Preventing youth homelessness in general

6.36 For the remaining respondents (17), their comments about prevention were more generic in nature, rather than specific to them; this included those who said nothing specific would have helped in their case. Similar to the themes discussed above, these comments fell into three broad categories – prevention in the home, including early intervention and Social Services input, prevention via the education systems and prevention in the community. Overall respondents suggested that a lot could be done to prevent youth homelessness, and that in many cases minor changes and inputs could act as interventions.

6.37 The majority of these respondents (6 out of 17) cited what could be done in the home setting which they felt would fully or partially contribute to preventing homelessness. A number of respondents noted a negative experience with Social Services with one citing: *Social Services did nothing for me my whole life....they blow it all off – ignored bruises and marks – I felt I was shoved to the side.* This respondent thought it would be better if there were *volunteers – to come and help – more of an ally – somebody who actually cares and shows love, care and compassion.* Another respondent talked about her own experience with social work intervention in her life. She said: *I've had about 10 social workers – they last about 4 months – they don't care. None of them stuck at things and it takes me time to trust – they don't do anything for you.* A further respondent indicated her opinion of the lack of social work intervention. She said: *Social Services were with us for a little while and then left. They thought everything was fine. If they had linked in with us more and done house checks.*

6.38 Other respondents referenced the need for input from all sides within the family, recognising that parents often need support and help in parenting their children and young people, in particular at critical points or stages. Whilst mediation was noted by some, there were also concerns that it would depend on how far the situation had progressed, and the mind-set of the parties involved. As well as mediation there were calls for more support for young people with mental health problems and addictions; one respondent noted: *Counselling and rehabilitation – knock it on the head early on before it catches them.*

6.39 The school setting and teachers were where a number of respondents (5) suggested that significant preventative work could be done. Firstly, this was focussed on specific work done on the theme of homelessness both in the classroom and by having speakers into the school to speak to young people. There was an emphasis on this type of approach being delivered by those who have lived experience of homelessness. One respondent said: *It should be done by people that have gone through it themselves, their actual and real experience, their story. I think young people would then take it more seriously.* Another respondent repeated this suggestion: *Young people are more inclined to listen to other young people rather than professionals.* Respondents also suggested when this should be delivered: *I think this should start in 1st year or it may be better from 3rd year onwards – more intense and developed.*

Secondly, there were suggestions of more activities in a school setting which would keep young people active and would help prevent them getting involved in alcohol or drugs or other behaviours which could ultimately result in homelessness. One respondent noted: *There should be more activities after and outside of school. Parents should be more involved and make more effort and then there would be less challenging behaviour. Challenging behaviour in a teenager is their way of calling out for help.*

Thirdly, direct intervention by the school/teachers was noted in a positive way, albeit that this was not always long-term. One respondent explained that her school had become involved in mediation when she was in the verge of homelessness. She said: *The first time Mum asked me to leave, the school got involved and everything was fine. It relieved the tensions. I hid it for a long time at school. I didn't want them to know...but then schools were closed because of covid.* A different respondent said: *At school when I was 17 one teacher noticed and she rang home. I started counselling....I knew*

it wasn't normal (having to look after the family). But I had very low attendance at school. I felt no-one asked and it was brushed under the carpet. Another respondent said that teachers should receive guidance and training in terms of spotting the signs relating to youth homelessness. She said: *teachers should be more aware of the indicators of what's not right at home – to understand what might be going on.* A further respondent said: In terms of any input at school, this respondent said – *nothing to do with them. One teacher helped – There was a lack of pastoral care but this person had been trained in that sector. He knew my older brother and knew a bit about my background. It was good like I had him there – he went to every meeting and fought my corner.*

6.40 Another theme on prevention was around information and communication (3 respondents), including not knowing where or how to access information. Whilst this may come through the channels noted above – family, Social Services and schools – there was also recognition of the importance of other community-based youth settings. One respondent said that young people should be told more about what it's like to live on your own. She said: *I would tell them to think twice before you want to leave home...it's not all positive when you are living on your own. There are a lot more negatives than positives...I would tell them this if it was going to change someone's life.* Another respondent called for more information and in particular leaflets, suggesting that not all young people have mobile phones. He said: *I think there should be more awareness, and more advertised so young person would know where to go if they need the help. Also need to remember that some young people don't have phones.*

6.41 A final theme linked to pro-social positive activities in the community; young people suggested that if they were busy and active in a positive way, then they would not have been pulled into anti-social behaviour, negative groups etc. Whilst this would be categorised as indirect prevention of youth homelessness, again it should not be overlooked. One respondent said he had been kept positively busy between the ages of 13 and 16 years as he was involved in football, boxing and kick-boxing. However, at this point he then got involved in the wrong crowd, started smoking and this led to arguments at home. He said: *It would have saved a lot of arguments. It was just the way I was going on...in the wrong direction.* This theme was taken up by another respondent who talked about the Prince's Trust and how this helped young people make connections through a range of programmes. Another respondent took this theme further by citing employment as being the biggest prevention of homelessness for young people. He said: *they should be opening up jobs for young people. I can see a difference since I got a job. It was a big turning point and brings it back to other people's level.*

6.42 Overall there was recognition that by integrating some changes into three key settings – the home, school and the wider community – there were opportunities to prevent youth homelessness in individual young people's lives.

Key Findings 3 - Challenges in service delivery and in inter-agency working

6.43 This sub-section looks at how services are delivered to young homeless people; in particular the analysis examines how the young respondents accessed and received the services they currently have, looks at how easy and smooth that was for them, provides feedback on their current accommodation and other support services and reviews what services they hope to access in future,

with a particular focus on their thoughts on what accommodation they will move to, and their suggestions on good practice. The analysis looks at the responses to a number of questions:

- Seeking help from statutory services: what happened when you presented as homeless?
- What is positive and negative about your current living situation?
- When and how do you hope to move on from your current living situation?
- What should be done for young people in terms of temporary accommodation, support, and move-on accommodation?

This sub-section covers two research objectives as follows:

- *Analysis of the associated challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing 'move on' options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready.*

- *Identification and exploration of the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions.*

Seeking help from statutory services

6.44 Young people were asked to outline what actions they had taken in relation to seeking help from statutory services about their homelessness. In the majority of cases reference was made to the Housing Executive (22 respondents) at some point in the process. Analysis of these respondents indicated a mixed experience. Some young people indicated that they did not approach the Housing Executive when they were first homeless. In some cases this was because they knew they were too young (to hold a tenancy) or that the waiting time for a social tenancy was very long, whilst in a small number of cases respondents said they did not know who or where to contact. One respondent said: *I searched Housing Executive and homeless – what do I do?* This point was noted earlier by another respondent in the discussion about preventing homelessness section, in relation to accessibility of information for young people who become homeless.

6.45 Significant numbers of young people (11) indicated that they had needed support and assistance from a staff member in their accommodation, in their interaction with the Housing Executive. This theme has already been highlighted in terms of communicating with statutory services, but it is worth noting here too. Young people aged 17 or 18 in particular, and those from vulnerable settings and backgrounds, are more likely to need ongoing support as they move into independent accommodation, and in their communication with the Housing Executive and other agencies. As noted before this covers factors such as confidence, having and understanding the right language and terminology, being able to understand systems and processes etc. One respondent said: *I applied to the Housing Executive; my Key Worker helped me with this....My Key Worker is trying to help me out. He knows I want out.* Another respondent said: *My Support Worker does all the 'to'ing and 'fro'ing with the Housing Executive.* A further respondent talked about how his support provider acts as the go between and that they are helping him to maximise the points he can get. Nevertheless he said: *I feel the Housing Executive is slow to respond and can't really help.* In many of these cases the young person was unsure of the actual application process. One respondent said: *It was all done over the phone. My Key Worker takes care of that. Communication hasn't been great, so I'm not really sure how it works.*

6.46 The need for support was particularly clear in the discussion with two young females, who were still living in family settings and receiving support from the YMCA. One respondent noted: *I really struggle with confidence to even go and speak to an adult. I am working on this with the YMCA but it is a barrier. I can't do anything by myself, even on the phone, I need help.* This theme was confirmed by another young respondent; she noted that she needed her Key Worker with her for any meetings or phone calls with the Housing Executive. She said: *Whenever I went, I was really scared. They asked lots of questions. I felt really intimidated as I was so young. It was good to have them (Key Worker) with me as they could give more information and it was less pressure. I was going through enough. It must be bad for young people with no support.*

6.47 Most respondents who had had interaction with the Housing Executive were able to name their Housing Advisor and were able to talk about their areas of choice and/or the number of housing points they were on. Some respondents were particularly positive about the input and difference made by their Housing Advisor. One young respondent who had come via the care system named his Housing Advisor, and said: *she goes to all my meetings with the social worker – she's helped me.* Another respondent said: *They (HE) actually were brilliant. I didn't know anything. And the Housing Officer did explain everything and reassured me.*

6.48 In contrast a small number of respondents (5) outlined a more negative experience of interaction with the Housing Executive. The main issue related to the actual or perceived length of waiting time, rather than the process itself, albeit that as noted above, some respondents said they needed help with the application process. One respondent put it like this: *It discourages you; there have been no letters in a while.* Another said: *Honestly you never hear back from them.* A further respondent said that she had now been waiting four years on the social housing waiting list and was still to receive even one offer of housing. One respondent noted: *They don't respond to phone calls and emails. It's a pure shambles. It's very frustrating. It feels like I'm trying my hardest and the Housing Executive are letting me down. I am trying to get my life back on track.* These respondents highlighted frustration in terms of waiting times, whilst recognising that the supply of suitable social housing for their needs was limited.

6.49 A number of respondents, who were now in the private rented sector, cited the length of waiting time as one of the main reasons they opted to get a private tenancy. One respondent said: *I wasn't getting anywhere. I gave up on them. I had to take things into my own hands....I never got homeless points or nothing. I literally gave up on the system.*

6.50 In contrast, a smaller number of respondents (5) were unsure about who their Housing Advisor was, what number/level of housing points they had and where they were in the overall process; albeit that some of this was clearly as a result of more phone rather than face-to-face communication because of Covid-19. Lack of communication was cited by a number of young people. One respondent, who was able to name their Housing Advisor, said: *there's been limited communication from him and none in the last six months.* Another said: *I was waiting about a month to be assessed. This was because of Covid-19 and the amount of people who are backlogged and time delays.*

6.51 In addition, a small number of respondents (5) referred to their interaction (or attempted interaction) with Social Services, as a young homeless person aged 16 or 17 coming through the care route and/or under the Joint Protocol between the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts. These interactions tended to be short-lived, and not all with a positive end result. The following comments highlight some gaps.

One respondent said he did not know where to apply when he became homeless at age 17. He said: *I went to the Housing Executive after I was 18 years old. Social Services was not mentioned before by anyone, not by the Housing Executive and not from Floating Support. Another noted: I tried to apply at age 17 years. I had a Social Worker and in the last two months before I was 18, they promised me a load of stuff. But as soon as I turned 18, all the support went.*

A further respondent said she had gone to the Housing Executive office just before her 18th birthday. She noted: *They tried to put me back to Social Services.* This respondent then outlined a complex journey between different accommodation providers and hostels, as well as her acceptance of a flat in a completely different area which had not worked out, and she ended up leaving the tenancy because of intimidation. This respondent cited at least four Housing Executive offices who had dealt with her application.

Another respondent outlined her situation when she approached the Housing Executive aged 17; in her case all of the protocols and processes appeared to work, albeit that over a period of time she was in a number of different locations and settings, some of which may be deemed unsuitable given her age. She said that she had initially phoned the Housing Executive, but because of her age the case was passed onto Social Services. She noted: *It was up to them. But they were already involved...I was always out of the home and not coming home.* She noted that she was initially placed in a 2-week assessment bed, then into a B&B for 6 – 7 months and is now in a Joint Commissioned supported accommodation project. This respondent made the following comment about her time in the B&B. *I was worried because there were alcoholics in the B&B and drugs. It was not the environment you want to be in – it was not the right environment for a young person. I told the manager (B&B) but he said there was nothing they can really do. I didn't really like to say to the Housing Executive or Social Services.*

A male respondent outlined his situation. He said: *I was passed from the Housing Executive to Gateway. It was so confusing for me. I was given so many phone numbers, and some were for the wrong department. The first number would say, ring the next number – then another number. It was back in circles. I finally got to the right person in the Gateway team.* The staff member present with this young person during the interview (as they were aged 17) noted: *there was a lack of information and knowledge by the Social Workers about 17-year-old pathways and what accommodation is available. In fairness the Housing Executive followed the process to Gateway. But he was let down. It got to the Gateway team and the legs came off.*

Current setting – accommodation and support

6.52 Respondents were also asked about where they were currently living, and in particular what they thought was positive and negative about this setting. Analysis for this section is divided into six different settings as follows:

- Foyers (4 respondents)
- Young people's projects including Joint Commissioned Supported accommodation (8 respondents)
- Temporary accommodation hostels for all age groups (6 respondents)
- Living in own tenancy with support, with a history of homelessness (6 respondents)
- Living in other situation – including single let, shared tenancy, sofa surfing (3 respondents)
- Living at home (2 respondents)

6.53 Four respondents were living in a Foyer¹⁷⁰; these respondents were generally very positive about the accommodation and service received. In particular they highlighted what the support available and what they had learnt whilst living there. One respondent noted the following: *Living here teaches you to be more independent. The staff have helped me to budget and save your money. And they help you learn how to clean and there were cooking classes – teaches you to cook.* Another respondent talked about the quick turnaround in getting a place at the Foyer. He noted that he heard about it through a friend who was living there. He then applied on a Wednesday, had an interview on the Thursday, an offer on the Friday and moved in the following Monday. This respondent felt the turnaround time in allocating a place was excellent, and this meant he was no longer sofa surfing and moving between friends and family. This respondent went on to make positive comments about his placement, comparing it to previous supported accommodation he had lived in. He noted the following: *I have my own space – everything is sitting the way I want it. Other places have curfews and are very strict. There is a lot more freedom here and you are treated more like an adult. All the flats are individual and I've got my own keys and space. It feels like you are living independently. The staff are very good – if I need help – my key worker really helps me – they are on the ball.*

Further positive comments were noted in relation to Foyers. One respondent said: *It's one of the best. Here I've got my own flat and my own space... Overall I can't think of any negatives.* Another respondent said that whilst he is registered as homeless, he does not feel homeless because of his placement at the Foyer. He commented on the following: *The staff are great; they are very helpful and very kind, and there if you need anything. They are here 24/7 and some places don't have that. I have a Support worker who is very easy to get hold of. I speak to him once every two weeks.*

Some negative comments related to the impact of living in a large facility, and the range of types of needs and behaviours. One respondent noted: *There is partying, loud noises, banging of doors, people lingering outside your flat.* Another respondent said: *Some of the people are a bit mad. The residents are on drugs and alcohol and this affects their behaviour – fighting and banging on doors. A lot are on something or drunk.* Other negatives included: *I'm not keen on the shared laundry room because I have anxiety and don't like my washing being lifted out. Not really much more than that.* Other negative factors stemmed from the lack of residents meetings and activities because of Covid-19.

¹⁷⁰ Strand Foyer and Flax Foyer.

Despite the negative comments these four respondents were keen to remain at their specific Foyer for the maximum period available (two years) and avail of all the services on offer.

6.54 A similar picture emerged for respondents living in other young people's accommodation projects including Joint Commissioned Supported accommodation¹⁷¹. These eight respondents provided largely positive feedback in terms of the ethos and approach of support and how staff worked with the young people. Commented included: *It opened a lot of doors for me here. I got myself into work and tech. And I made friends. I motivated myself and the staff are very supportive and good at encouraging you. They try and get you to do things – it's motivating.* Another respondent said: *The staff are nice and easy to talk to. They help a lot if you're struggling and give you care packages.*

Respondents pointed to the learning they had achieved in their time in this location. One respondent summed it up as follows: *It gives me that sense of responsibility to fend for myself, shopping and washing. It is helping me to get ready for my own place. The staff are there for anything, help with budgeting, how to set money aside.* Respondents all pointed to a sense of preparation for having their own tenancy, whilst being supported in a safe environment.

In addition, there were positive comments about the facilities and opportunity to have their own space. One respondent said: *The fact that you have your own room, space and have it the way you want it – you can be yourself.* Another said: *Having your own room. The standard is great and the location is good.* Another noted: *It's a nice place altogether. The accommodation in bedsits; the layout is good and the location is good. Because you are in the town it is very handy for shopping.*

Some of the respondents in these young people's projects made comparisons to other placements they had in more generic hostels. These varied from a negative experience where one female respondent said: *Old men touching me – a lot of bad things happened to me there* to a more positive sense where they felt they were treated more like young adults. One respondent noted: *It doesn't get treated like a Children's home – more like young adults.*

Similar to comments on the Foyers, respondents noted some negative points in relation to the dynamic of the resident group. One respondent said: *this place was problematic for a while. In the first six months I was here it was really rowdy. They were knocking on my door at 3am and the noise.* Another respondent noted: *Some people who come in to it, the staff can't control it. But if you keep yourself to yourself, it's sweet.* This respondent also suggested that cannabis is available within his accommodation, and this had put pressure on him. He said: *I used to smoke cannabis and stopped it. I was off it for six months. Then I moved here, and two months later by Christmas I was doing it again...it's freely available in here.* Some respondents felt rules and curfews were too strict, but could also understand why they were in place.

¹⁷¹ These included the young person's project (Malone Foyer), and Joint commissioned projects at Jefferson Court (First Housing), Tafelta Rise and Riverside (BCM) and Antrim Road (SCNI).

6.55 Six respondents were living in temporary accommodation hostels across Northern Ireland¹⁷², suitable for all age groups and provided by a number of organisations. A number of very positive comments were made about the standard of the accommodation, the input of staff, the facilities available etc. These included: *It's close for getting into the town for shops, it's warm and there are facilities you can use. I have my own room and there is a communal kitchen and living space. It's fine if everybody is not making their food at the same time.* Another respondent said: *The staff are great. There is always someone to talk to, and it's easier getting stuff done. Things are difficult by myself. They gave me help setting up with photographic ID and getting Universal Credit sorted.* A further respondent noted: *There's loads of support in here from the key workers. Help with everything. They ring the Housing Executive and other agencies.*

There was also a sense that these individuals felt the accommodation was not entirely suitable for their age group and/or their needs. Respondents commented as follows: *I feel this hostel is all for the men and there is not enough support for the young women.* Again similar to the previous types of accommodation (Foyers and young people's projects), there were negative comments about the dynamics within the hostel and the client group. One respondent said: *There are a lot of people high on drugs and this results in violence and self-harm.* A further respondent noted: *There are loud, difficult and annoying cases. A few of them are bouncing from hostel to hostel to hostel. They know what they can get away with.* Other negative comments related to some facilities (which respondents felt were outdated or in need of repair), some of the rules and curfews and the level/availability of WIFI.

6.56 Six respondents, with a history of youth homelessness, were now in their own tenancy including social rented (Housing Executive and Housing Association) and also the private rented sector. In all cases the respondent either currently had or previously had Floating Support services¹⁷³. All of these respondents displayed contentment in having their own place/tenancy, and were proud of what they had been able to achieve. One universal comment related to the Floating Support they had received, with comments that this had made a significant difference to them both in settling in and maintaining and keeping their tenancy. One respondent noted: *They really helped with my mental health and gave me support. And they did H&S checks. It was a good standard and quality of accommodation – and this gave me stability.*

Positive factors noted included the location of the accommodation and accessibility to shops and services, being in a position of being tenancy ready and able to cope. Having their own space and privacy was mentioned by all respondents in this grouping. One noted: *It's really nice to have my own space and somewhere to call home and to be able to decorate.*

Some negative factors included coping with neighbour issues and living alone in the wider community. One respondent said: *In the community it's a lot more scarier than in the project (name given) where staff members were there 24 hours a day.* Another respondent summarised how it had been more difficult than she thought. *It's hard like, it's a struggle. It is hard living on your own. I feel I was moved around between children's homes and then between hostels. Before I was always with loads of people*

¹⁷² These included Simon Community NI hostels and the Lighthouse hostel in Ballymena.

¹⁷³ Floating Support from Simon Community NI, Shelter NI, Action for Children NI and MACs.

and also looked after. And now I've gone from having over 20 people around me to being on my own, and it's really lonely. And to look after myself, that has been a big jump now

6.57 Three respondents were in different settings. This included one young person in a single let, another in a shared tenancy through the MACs scheme and one who was sofa surfing between two sets of friends. Their situations are examined individually. The young person in the single let was positive about the accommodation and location, and whilst she knew it was temporary accommodation, she was content with this situation whilst on the housing waiting list. The respondent in the shared tenancy was very positive about this type of accommodation setting, noting that she liked having company and it was positive to have shared bills/costs and to know that the rent is covered through Housing Benefit (because this is under the shared tenancy model). She noted: *I didn't know them. I did an application over the phone and I was asked about my interests. It is a good match and we get on so well. We have tried to make it work.* Finally, the respondent who was sofa surfing was less satisfied with her situation. Whilst she acknowledged the positives: *They are super friends. They are here to talk and give moral support and I'm glad they are not strangers,* she also noted the negatives of her situation, compounded that she was 8-months pregnant: *I would like to be independent. I feel like I am invading people's spaces and privacy.*

6.58 Two respondents were living at home with parents/grandparents or other family members, and had been involved in the YMCA educational project about homelessness. Whilst both these female respondents highlighted some of the positives of being in a 'home' setting, they also noted what they felt were the negatives, including ongoing family arguments and disputes, and the fact they felt they were being asked to do too much in terms of housework and looking after other family members. Both respondents had moved between different family settings, and their current setting, whilst stable at present, demonstrated elements which suggested a potential pathway into youth homelessness.

Moving on from your current living situation

6.59 Thirteen of the 29 young people indicated that they wanted to stay in their current accommodation. This was generally because they felt settled and the accommodation and support was providing them with a level of stability, that they had not in many cases previously experienced. These young people were largely either in young people's accommodation projects (Foyers, supported accommodation for young people and specific young people's projects) or had their own tenancy in the social or private rented sector, with Floating Support. The latter young people in their own tenancy were mainly aged 24 and 25 (four respondents) with one aged 18 and the other aged 19. One young person in a Foyer said he was content to stay in this setting for the two years available, and until there is an offer of social housing. In contrast, one young person who was on the verge of homelessness (but still at home) said – *the minute I could get somewhere on my own, I would go immediately.*

For some of these young people 'forward thinking' about their accommodation was not a priority, and they indicated that they were happy to be where they were living at present. Some noted that it was better to wait where they currently are and not move around as they had previously done. *Since I'm already waiting for social housing, need to have patience and time, instead of moving out now.* Others

indicated that they felt they were not tenancy ready, and needed this period of time to get ready for moving into their own place. One respondent said: *I would like a pause before I'm offered a tenancy. I might look like I'm ready but I'm not. I find it difficult to cope on my own – I need to feel ready mentally.* This respondent went on to say: *I want to stay as long as I can, and get in the right mind, with a clear head and getting ready.*

6.60 The majority of respondents indicated that they had applied for or were interested in/had a preference for social housing (19). The main reasons given were they felt it would be easier given their financial situation and benefits, and that the process would be easier: *The social housing – you get offered a place whereas the private rental you have to go and look for it and it's a lot more expensive.* Another repeated response was in terms of the potential waiting time for an offer of social housing. One respondent said: *I don't know where I am on the waiting list. I just give up with the Housing Executive. I am hoping to hear back from them and to try that avenue first.*

One respondent who had a social housing tenancy talked about her future plans for owner occupation. She said: *In 10 years' time I want to be in my own house.*

A small number of respondents were already living in a social rented tenancy and in receipt of Floating Support services. They were very positive about their current living situation, noting that it helped them to sustain their tenancy and living arrangements. One respondent said: *It's brilliant and helps a lot.*

6.61 There was general agreement across all respondents that the private rented sector was not a tenure of choice or accessibility for most young people. As a result respondents said they had not really explored this option, or when they had looked into it, they had not then actively progressed any serious deliberations around this tenure. The key factor noted by young respondents was cost and affordability; there were numerous comments on this including: *it's too expensive for people like me, not working. I haven't really looked into it.* Another respondent said: *If I could find somewhere but I would need a deposit and rent in advance. And there's not too many one bed places so I might have to look for a two bed one, and then it would be the cost again.* A further respondent said: *I have thought about it. I struggle with money so don't think it's the option for me. I look at the prices but I can't afford that.*

Another factor that young people noted in their consideration of renting privately was past experience. One respondent said – *for the private rented sector, my past experience with landlords puts me off; they don't take accountability for things.*

The following response sums up the decision-making process and factors taken into account for young people when considering the private rented sector.

The private rented sector has been discussed. I just couldn't afford it and I would struggle with the cost. It's better to be with social housing and not such a strain on benefits. In the private rented sector a lot of them aren't really good. It can be quite expensive and then the cheaper ones, not an ideal living place – the quality is not great and there can be damp. If I did like somewhere, I probably

couldn't take it, couldn't get the deposit together in time. £400 in a realistic time it would take well over nine months to save this up.

Some respondents had been looking to rent privately, and had been trying to see if they could put the necessary finances in place. Respondents recognised that access to the private rented sector would be quicker than getting an offer of a house via social housing. One respondent in a Foyer said: *I've looked at a few but it is very expensive. I could do the deposit. But what about the rent? I have been looking for a part-time job that suits my mental state. I tried McDonald's, but it didn't go well with my autism and social anxiety. I lasted two months.*

A small number of respondents raised the option of the Tenancy Deposit scheme, including a female who was 8 months pregnant at the time of interview. She was looking at the private rented scheme as she was currently sofa surfing between two sets of friends, and felt she urgently needed to get accommodation sorted out with her baby due imminently.

Another female respondent had recently moved out of temporary accommodation into a private rented one-bedroom flat. She was very content with this arrangement and the area she was located. She noted the support she had received to make this move: *It was done in a measured way, with my Move-on Plan.* In this respondent's case she had saved the money needed for the deposit over her two years in temporary accommodation and her landlord had not asked for a guarantor. She noted: *I am content and happy to stay for now.*

A further female respondent was also renting privately; her pathway involved support as a care leaver including a higher level of housing costs being covered because she was care-experienced. She said: *Universal credit and housing costs covers most of it so it is affordable. And I get help from the 16-plus Pathway team because I'm still in education – they give me the difference.* This respondent said she might consider social housing in the future, although she outlined that she had recently got a dog for emotional support and company, and she was unsure whether it would be allowed in a social rented tenancy.

Another respondent said his family were buying a place which he was then going to rent. He said: *I'm going to rent it. It will be affordable because of my wage, and I get housing benefit to help a lot.* He said that because it was family, he would not have to pay a deposit, and he was already sorting out furniture.

These comments about accessing the private rented sector support the conclusion that the private rented sector is only really an option for a young people if someone is helping them, in particular financially e.g. Social Services as a care leaver or family support.

6.62 Other possible living situations and types of housing/accommodation were discussed. One of these was the shared tenancy option; this was described to the young person, and they were then asked whether they would consider such an option. Respondents were universal in commenting on the need to meet and get to know the other tenant in an organised/constructive way, with sufficient/adequate timing built in for this process.

Three respondents very clearly said they would consider this option, citing the fact that bills and housing costs would be shared and it would provide them with longevity in their housing arrangement, together with having company and companionship. One respondent said: *I like the fact you can stay there until you are 21. They match someone with you, and then bring you to meet together. I think this matching is good.*

A further respondent was already living in a shared tenancy, which had been set up by the MACS project. She provided positive feedback and said she intended to stay in the shared tenancy, commenting: *You can stay as long as you want – that’s good. If it was just a year it would be stressful. But I’m not stressed now because I always have a roof over my head – the stress has lifted off my shoulders.* She noted the stability in her living situation and said: *I love where I am living – it is close to Belfast and it’s a nice area of Belfast.*

Conversely a number of respondents (4) were adamant in saying this would not be an option they would consider. Their responses including factors relating to safety and security, their mental health and anxiety levels, concerns about sharing and worries about what would happen if the ‘match’ and sharing arrangement broke down. One respondent commented: *the whole aspect if that person decides to leave one day.* Thinking around the potential downside of a shared tenancy was summed up by one respondent: *I have considered this with a couple of friends. It would be affordable but I don’t think it is very practical. What happens if it doesn’t turn out well and there are arguments? There are loads of people in and out of shared houses because of that, and this has an impact on mental health. It’s a good idea but not for me, or for people with mental health issues. Going in with strangers, definitely no, because of my anxiety, I wouldn’t be comfortable in shared areas.*

Other models of good practice

6.63 The interview schedule also included a question about other potential improvements to service delivery for young homeless people. The theme of other models of prevention has already been covered; young people also provided responses in relation to their suggestions on temporary accommodation, support and move-on accommodation. Analysis of responses on these themes is outlined in table 20. These demonstrate some very clear findings; that young people’s preference is to be accommodated in temporary accommodation with other young people rather than in all-age hostels, and that high levels of those in temporary accommodation feel they are tenancy ready, albeit that they recognise that ongoing support would be helpful.

Table 20: Young people’s suggestions: Models of good practice

Area and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
<p>Temporary accommodation – 18</p>	<p>The majority of respondents under this heading highlighted their preference that temporary accommodation should be self-contained, with minimal inclusion of shared facilities e.g., bathrooms and kitchens. Those respondents in temporary accommodation which provided them with their own self-contained unit were particularly positive about this approach. They also highlighted differences between generic hostels (for all age and needs groups) in contrast to specialist young people’s projects (for a specific age category and needs groups). One respondent noted: <i>the Foyer is the best place for me. Other places had curfews and rules which were difficult to keep. I understand the need for them – but they should be appropriate to the needs of those living there.</i> Another Foyer resident said: <i>I’m around people of my own age here at this young person’s project – not in other hostels.</i> This latter point about the age range and mix of ages was reiterated by other respondents; one in supported accommodation noted: <i>everyone in here is under 20. We get along so it’s better for young people.</i> Another said: <i>this young person’s project is a lot better, more secure and you feel safer.</i></p> <p>The young people also suggested that some temporary accommodation, as it is currently configured and in terms of its size (30 or more units) does not enable them to practice for independent living.</p> <p>A small number of respondents (6) highlighted a bad experience in temporary accommodation hostels and B&Bs. One respondent said the following about a hostel: <i>when I was there, I didn’t really have a choice but to use drugs. There was pressure from the people around me. This needs to be improved. You always have the people at your door. You couldn’t sit and relax.</i> Another said: <i>They are just threw in, and it’s just asking for trouble having people with different needs and ages. Not everyone’s problems can be dealt with in the same way.</i> Another respondent commented on their experience in a B&B; saying: <i>there were people there from Belfast and they were in their mid-20s to 50s. You don’t know who you are in contact with.</i></p> <p>In some cases, respondents referenced particularly bad experiences in generic hostels. One respondent said: <i>In my honest opinion I don’t think any 18 – 20-year-old woman should be in a hostel at all. It is very dangerous.</i> This respondent suggested there should be female only hostels and also hostels for younger people up to the age of 25.</p> <p>In discussing this theme respondents showed insight into their own vulnerabilities. One respondent noted that he felt at 18 he was too vulnerable to go into what he referred to as an adult hostel. He said: <i>they were trying to put me in Centenary House but I didn’t want to go there.</i> This concern was echoed by another respondent. He said: <i>I appreciate that all homeless people need to be housed, but I was offered this hostel. It was really the only option but I said I would choose to continue to sofa surf than go there. For one thing it was too far away. But it was the idea of that type of hostel, you hear so many horror stories.</i></p>

Area and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
<p>Support and move-on – 25</p>	<p>A number of respondents (17) felt they were tenancy ready and would be able to cope in their own place. One respondent said: <i>I can handle myself and manage most things but I know it will be easier said than done.</i> Another respondent from the YMCA Homelessness project said she had learnt the skills for independent living at the YMCA. She said: <i>We done all the core stuff. We did Cook It in a girl's group, learning to cook. Also budgeting and doing interviews. There was a big gap, but we had the freedom to do these things.</i> This highlighted the importance of support in preparation for independent living.</p> <p>Young people in supported accommodation and young people's projects said that they felt tenancy ready or were working towards this. One respondent noted: <i>I've been looking after my own flat here – so get my shopping and pay for everything. I do my own laundry and budgeting.</i> Another said: <i>I do it all – shop, cook, own cleaning and washing. Universal credit is very low, £150 every two weeks, but it is manageable and it can be done.</i></p> <p>Other respondents (8) said they were not ready and would need support. One respondent said: <i>Not entirely ready – not 100%. Here I have the freedom to try and do things for myself.</i> A further respondent noted: <i>I don't know anything about budgeting for bills and shopping or emergencies. Schools don't teach you anything. They are just teaching the curriculum.</i> Overall, these respondents felt they were not ready to cope with managing money, budgeting, cooking, shopping etc. and that they would need some support in these areas. One respondent emphasised this by saying: <i>I struggle with cooking and budgeting money and phoning places.</i> Another noted: <i>I don't have a clue where to start. People have tried to help and I can't do it. My Universal credit only lasts for two days; the money burns a hole in my pocket. I've not had budgeting help.</i></p> <p>Most respondents also suggested that it would be good to have ongoing support, at least at the outset of moving into their own accommodation, and also with the recognition that their other needs may require support for independent living. One respondent said: <i>I'm conscious of my mental health and being on my own.</i> Another said: <i>I don't think I'll ever be ready. I'm not sure of myself and if I would be able to do it. I would prefer to have support to give me reassurance.</i> A further respondent made similar comments relating to their mental health and ability to cope on their own; he noted: <i>it's the whole aspect of being alone after being used to having people all around you. If there was someone to chat to and a bit more mental health support.</i></p> <p>Respondents talked about the need to ensure support is provided at the right time for the individual and that it should last for a varying timescale based on the individual's needs. One respondent noted: <i>All the help came to an end suddenly; it felt like I was rushed off everything.</i></p> <p>A number of respondents said they had good friends and family members who they could rely on for support; but this was not the case for all the young people, with some indicating that they had very limited support networks.</p>

Area and number of respondents	Nature – commentary and qualitative quotes
	<p>Recipients of Floating Support confirmed their support for this type of service. One respondent in the private rented sector who had received Floating Support for a number of months after moving noted: <i>It helps you get started, at least once a week. And then there are texts, voice calls and face to face. And you can go on walks with them. They help with mental health; they do budgeting and they help us look after our own tenancy.</i> Another respondent who had received Floating Support when she first moved into the private rented sector for about 7 months, said: <i>I had this for a while but then I didn't feel I needed them anymore. They made sure I had all the numbers I could call. And helped with things to do with the tenancy – paying bills and budgeting.</i></p> <p>Common themes in discussing move-on accommodation centred on factors relating to the need for self-contained accommodation with no communal aspects, the fact that as a young person having moved around a lot, it was difficult to gather together the items needed for a home, and the need for practical support including food parcels/groceries and practical help setting up their home. Responses confirmed this often difficult balance of young people desiring privacy and space to be independent, but also recognition that moving into their own place could lead to isolation and difficulty coping. Having ongoing and sufficient external support for their living arrangements was an important factor noted by respondents.</p>

Introduction

7.1 Responses to youth homelessness are continuously being reviewed and adapted by the Housing Executive and homeless service providers to both meet the needs of the young people themselves, and to respond to changing external circumstances e.g. changes in welfare benefits, the structure of the housing market, availability of accommodation in the different housing tenures etc. This sub-section looks at a number of themes as follows:

- NI Housing Executive typology and funding of homelessness preventative models;
- Outline and examples of different models – intervention, training, personal development, awareness and social enterprise models;
- Accommodation models and Support models;

This sub-section is based on an analysis of available reports and wider data, together with analysis of interviews from the fieldwork stage. For all types of models, reference is made to services which have been piloted and provided in Northern Ireland, with an additional focus on highlighting, where possible other models under these headings in Great Britain. Some of these were also referenced in the literature review in Section 3, provided by Professor Nicholas Pleace. In addition, it should be noted that some of these models were discussed in the interviews with stakeholders and young people; in some cases we asked specific questions about particular models e.g. shared tenancies, and in other cases respondents independently raised or commented on different projects and services. Their feedback is included as a final part of this section.

NI Housing Executive – Typology and funding of homelessness preventative models

7.2 The NI Housing Executive funds a wide range of different models including accommodation and services (see Section 2) and other provision aimed at direct and indirect responses to youth homelessness. The Homeless Prevention Fund¹⁷⁴ has been in place since 2019/20¹⁷⁵ and is now in its third year of operation. In the last year (2020/21) a total of 35 projects were funded, with the allocation of total funding amounting to £839,325. As part of this research, the NI Housing Executive shared the final evaluation reports¹⁷⁶ from nine Homeless prevention projects, funded through the Homeless Prevention Fund¹⁷⁷. It should be noted that intervention and personal development models were prioritised over awareness and training models in year 2 in order to maximise the number of service users directly benefitting from the projects. Mediation and counselling models were found to achieve the greatest impact and also to be the most cost effective. Thanks are due to these projects

¹⁷⁴ Information provided by NI Housing Executive - The Fund is administered by a small team within NIHE's Housing Services division. The Fund was initiated in line with the strategic objective of prioritising prevention. In the first year of operation there were approximately 600 direct beneficiaries, with 2,250 in year 2.

¹⁷⁵ 29 projects funded – total of £395,817 funding allocated.

¹⁷⁶ It should be noted that the evaluation reports are based on the group's own delivery and evaluation of services with no independent assessment of this. They are based on outputs and in some cases outcomes, but no in-depth analysis of cause and effect, cost benefit analysis or spend to save assessments.

¹⁷⁷ It should be noted that this Fund supports projects for all age groups, including those aimed at young people.

for their inclusion in the research. It is recognised that Covid-19 had an impact on the delivery of all of these projects in the financial year 2020/21¹⁷⁸.

This section looks at a range of different models under the following headings:

- **Intervention models** – Mediation and/or counselling or through direct financial support;
- **Training models** – To empower and equip sector workers who have been identified as working with those at risk of homelessness;
- **Personal development models** – To provide a structured training programme to empower and equip participants who have been identified as at risk of homelessness;
- **Awareness models** – To raise awareness of the complex nature of homelessness and available support services among those identified as at risk of homelessness;
- **Social Enterprise models** – To improve communities, tackle social issues and provide access to employment and skills training for individuals identified as at risk of homelessness¹⁷⁹.

Intervention models

7.3 In this sub-section we examine a number of funded projects. Firstly, one project which aimed to provide mediation between young people and their families, either as a preventative approach or when homelessness was imminent; the Young Persons Housing Advocacy and Mediation Service (YPHAMS)¹⁸⁰ delivered by Housing Rights. This project, Renting Rights, provided a service to a total of 227 beneficiaries aged 18 to 25 years. The project was evaluated through collated results from beneficiary feedback forms, using an Outcomes Based Accountability report card.

The project was delivered via a Young People Development worker. This specialist support service was provided to assist young people in housing need, who are in or trying to access rented accommodation (either private or social), who are living in a shared housing and who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The service offered advice and information, casework and advocacy and mediation. Housing Rights provides a wider housing advice service for all age groups of the population; young people were signposted to Renting Rights as appropriate.

The project demonstrated a number of outcomes as result of the project and using the service as follows:

- 47 young people were prevented from homelessness;
- 147 young people were able to sustain their accommodation/tenancy (this included successful application for Discretionary Housing Payment, grants for essential household items, referrals for practical and emotional support);
- 8 young people were supported to access temporary accommodation;
- 21 young people were supported to access permanent accommodation;
- 50 young people were supported to access relevant welfare or benefits;

¹⁷⁸ Given the Covid pandemic some of the projects had to identify re-alignment of funds, embracing alternative methods of delivery due to the impact of Covid-19 and some unfortunately had to reduced their anticipated spend.

¹⁷⁹ These projects are separate from those funded through the Social Enterprise Fund and can be viewed as complementary to these where the focus is on preventing vulnerable individuals becoming homeless.

¹⁸⁰ Information from Housing Rights – Final Project Report, April 2021.

- 86 young people were supported to access financial advice and 81 young people had improved financial situations (via Social Security Benefit advice, charitable grants to help access and sustain accommodation, Universal Credit Contingency Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments);
- One young person was supported to gain employment (paid or voluntary).

Other outcomes were measured through feedback from the young people themselves. Where relevant, 97% of young people felt their relationship with other parties (landlord, family member or other) had improved as a result of taking part in the project. The project evaluation also highlighted important learning from the mediation element of the service; namely that throughout the structured processes which build towards a formal mediation session, the parties along with the mediator have opportunities to find resolution to their dispute. Positive mediation outcomes were demonstrated as being achieved prior to the actual formal mediation sessions occurring.

The project had other valuable outcomes as it enabled Housing Rights to make support referrals on behalf of 60 young people, which may not otherwise have been put in place. This included the development of relationships with Housing Executive Patch and Housing Solutions teams, including establishing a formal referral pathway for Housing Executive staff dealing with young people who require independent advice or mediation.

In addition, the project evaluation also noted that *young people who engaged with YPHAMS have a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities in relation to housing. This knowledge will be useful to them throughout future tenancies and with any further housing problems they may have. These young people and potentially their peers know where to go for housing advice in future. Those who were helped by the mediation service have learned valuable, transferable life skills which has the potential to help them in other areas of their lives*¹⁸¹.

As well as working directly with individual young people, the project also looked at the wider implications of housing issues arising from individual cases. The evaluation report covered themes including the impact of Covid-19 on student accommodation (contracts, cancellation policy, return of deposit), prevention of homelessness and wider implications of rates award periods and HMO tenants at risk of County Court judgements.

The project also focussed on working towards the development of a Young Person's peer led Forum, to enable young people to shape this service in a way which best meets their housing needs¹⁸². Overall the evaluation report demonstrated both the clear need for this project, and its ongoing impact in terms of assisting young people. Based on this research study, and in particular looking at the feedback from young people, there is a clear linkage between findings around not knowing where to seek help, wanting help with family relationships, wanting information and support with their housing issues – and the focus and approach of this project. Whilst it is valuable to undertake one-off pilots

¹⁸¹ Information from Housing Rights – Final Project Report, April 2021.

¹⁸² This work involved interactive focus groups, and because of the impact of Covid-19, and on the recommendation of the youth organisations, it was necessary to postpone this planned element of project development. Pending availability of funding and when it is safe to do so, development of a Young People's Forum will continue.

to test the need for and benefits of an advocacy and mediation service for young people, it is clear that without this being sustained in the longer term, young people may lack access to suitable information, advice, mediation and advocacy services.

7.4 Other mediation projects have been piloted in Northern Ireland; for example, the Youth Homelessness Mediation service provided by Family Mediation NI¹⁸³. The overall aims of this service was to support the young person and their family to resolve their difficulties with a variety of outcomes including the young person either returning home or remaining at home, the young person moving in a planned way to live with other family or friends or the young person moving to alternative accommodation in a planned manner. In circumstances where the young person cannot return home, mediation can result in the family agreeing to support the young person in living independently. Family Mediation NI noted that this was a pilot project for one year (2019/20) funded by Nationwide. They referenced the complexity of the client group, and noted that many of the referrals (from the partner MACS) did not always demonstrate the criteria necessary for mediation; they described this as a practical future focussed process requiring willingness, capacity and ability to compromise. They also concluded that many of the young people were more in need of family therapy and psychological interventions, rather than mediation. This focus is discussed at paragraph 7.13.

7.5 Shelter produced a Mediation Good practice guide in 2004¹⁸⁴; whilst aspects of this are now dated, the underlying principles remain consistent. The Guide outlines seven stages of the mediation process, examines the role of the mediator and notes what makes a successful mediation. The Guide highlights the need to have mediation at the stage of early intervention and preferably before a young person has left or been thrown out of the family home and a crisis point has been reached. A wide range of options are referenced including parenting groups for parents of teenagers, support groups for young people (attached to youth services, voluntary agencies or health services), family counselling and family conferencing. The need for a respite accommodation service, available on an emergency basis and ideally allied to mediation was also noted; this is examined later in this Section under the heading of accommodation models.

7.6 An online search also indicates that mediation projects are often small-scale and localised, and generally focussed on family mediation for a wide range of issues, and not solely focussed on homelessness. For example, projects in English local authority areas such as Hertfordshire¹⁸⁵ and in smaller areas e.g. Banbury young homelessness project (BYHP)¹⁸⁶ and the Basement project in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire¹⁸⁷. The Hertfordshire mediation service is described as a *confidential, impartial mediation service that works with families who are having arguments...they work with young people and their families to help them resolve their arguments and move forward in a way that feels fair to everyone involved.*

¹⁸³ [Youth Homelessness Mediation – Family Mediation NI](#)

¹⁸⁴ [Shelter - Mediation for young people.pdf \(lemosandcrane.co.uk\)](#)

¹⁸⁵ Herts young homeless project - [Mediation - hyh - herts young homeless](#)

¹⁸⁶ [Health & Wellbeing at BYHP, the Banbury Young Homelessness Project](#)

¹⁸⁷ [Support to young people in North Worcestershire who are homeless \(bromsgrovebasementproject.org.uk\)](#)

Another example is the talk²sort Mediation Service¹⁸⁸ provided by the Bridge (East Midlands – mainly Leicestershire) which works with young people aged 11-19, and their families, who may be having problems at home or with their relationships. The project aims to support people to explore ways of resolving conflict. The overall rationale for the project is to reduce the likelihood that a young person will face homelessness in both the immediate and distant future. Interestingly this service is funded by a combination of funders including from health and housing¹⁸⁹. An evaluation of this service by Homeless Link indicates the value of mediation in preventing homelessness¹⁹⁰.

In Wales Llamau outline their mediation services under the heading of youth homelessness prevention¹⁹¹, whilst in Scotland mediation is a key theme at Government level¹⁹² and in terms of delivery models¹⁹³. The clear Government focus is on pre-crisis activity; the cited report notes: *Intervention in the form of family mediation has been found to be particularly helpful in respect of young teenagers and there are examples of practice where earlier intervention led to successful outcomes for young people and their parents.* An interesting element of the Scottish Government approach is ensuring that mediation is available at a young age; they note the Amber mediation service run by Edinburgh Cyrenians in partnership with other agencies. The referral age was lowered to include 14 – 16-year-olds, following recognition that this can interject both before and at the point of problems escalating in the family.

7.7 Other intervention models have included those which are funded to assess young people in relation to receipt of direct financial support for a rent deposit or rent in advance. Those reviewed for this Section include the Start-up project by Action for Children and the Rent... Sorted scheme delivered by BCM.

The Start-up project¹⁹⁴ was relatively small-scale. The service received a total of five applications, with all of these successful in gaining affordable and sustainable private rented accommodation, and four individuals allocated a Floating Support Worker to secure private rental accommodation and benefitting from the fund (a grant of £1,200 each to cover rent deposit, electric and heating costs, essential household items and if required removal services). The fifth individual continued to receive assistance from the Floating Support service for a period of up to two years. In addition, the project helped the participants to access relevant welfare or benefits, access financial advice, manage their physical and mental health and reduce their isolation. Three participants were supported in gaining education services.

The case-studies outlined in the evaluation report demonstrated the critical intervention of the rent deposits in ensuring the young people could access private rental accommodation, as well as the significant benefit of ongoing support with financial/practical costs and with wider social and

¹⁸⁸ [Talk2Sort Mediation | The Bridge \(East Midlands\), Loughborough & Leicestershire \(thebridge-eastmidlands.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁸⁹ Public Health England, Children in Need and Charnwood Borough Council (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government Homelessness Prevention Fund).

¹⁹⁰ [Young and Homeless 2018.pdf](#) See page 38 onwards.

¹⁹¹ [Preventing Youth Homelessness | Llamau](#)

¹⁹² [Prevention of Homelessness Guidance - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#)

¹⁹³ [Mediation and Support \(cyrenians.scot\)](#) and [Mediation and Homelessness. Cyrenians..pdf \(lemosandcrane.co.uk\)](#)

¹⁹⁴ Information from Action for Children – Floating Support Service, Start Up Project - Project Evaluation Report, April 2021.

emotional support. The lessons learned from the project included recommendations that any similar project should run over a longer period of time, and that applicants should be actively searching for rental properties prior to allocation, particularly as landlords are reluctant to 'hold' properties whilst awaiting funding. The positive impact of the project is summed up in the following quote from a young person: *I would recommend this to other young people as I had no idea of how to go about getting private accommodation or how to afford it. The Floating Support worker always kept me right. I feel fully supported with them, I did not understand the housing process and felt very overwhelmed at the thought of becoming homeless and find somewhere to live.*

7.8 The BCM Rent... Sorted scheme¹⁹⁵ received funding to provide financial support for ten young people over a period of four months, via their Floating Support Service operating in the Armagh, Dungannon and Magherafelt area. A total of 12 young people (2 male and 10 female) benefitted from the project, receiving financial support for their deposit and electric/heating costs. The overall aim of the project was to provide funding to young people in order to help them access a tenancy (primarily private rented) and to assist with heating and light on moving into their new tenancy. The rationale for the project was two-fold; firstly that tenancy sustainment is key to preventing repeat homelessness and floating support services were attached to the project to support the young people for up to two years; and secondly that the main barrier to accessing private rented accommodation is cost including rent deposits and estate agents charging fees to view a property. As well as enabling the 12 beneficiaries to access permanent accommodation, other outcomes included access to financial advice and relevant benefits, support to manage physical and mental health including registration with health professionals and making/attending appointments and support to gain employment/education services.

7.9 Other similar schemes exist in Northern Ireland and in other jurisdictions, with a focus on enabling young people to access the private rented sector. For example, some accommodation providers have their own schemes e.g. the Strand Foyer rent deposit scheme provided by Apex Housing Association, the Simon Community Tenancy Sustainment project (rent deposit scheme) and the Housing Fund scheme provided by MACS which provides rent in advance and deposits. Whilst the Simon Community project is not age specific, 28 people under the age of 25 have received deposits and been supported to move into their own accommodation in the private rented sector. Other external groups with an interest in homelessness and accommodation provision have developed one-off or localised schemes, although these are not exclusively for young people e.g. Vineyard Compassion. In addition, organisation's working with young homeless people can access external funding sources e.g. Vicar's Relief Fund¹⁹⁶, in order to access rent in advance or deposits.

7.10 Similar to Northern Ireland, rent deposit or guarantee schemes in Scotland are administered by a range of different organisations including local councils, housing associations, voluntary organisations, churches and community groups. Examples include schemes run by the Simon

¹⁹⁵ Information from BCM Final Report Homelessness Prevention Funding 20 - 21, April 2021.

¹⁹⁶ The Vicar's Relief Fund (VRF) was established by St Martin-in-the-Fields charity. The VRF helps those who are homeless or vulnerably housed through small-sum, rapid response grants to prevent eviction or access accommodation. Front-line workers can apply on behalf of their clients for grants to help prevent eviction (of up to £350) or access accommodation (of up to £500).

Community Scotland¹⁹⁷, the Borders Council area¹⁹⁸ and East Ayrshire Council¹⁹⁹. The latter example was developed by the Council and is now managed by the Community Housing Advocacy Project (CHAP).

7.11 A helpful resource exists for those wanting to identify the availability of rent deposit schemes in their area. Covering the UK, and administered by Crisis, this portal – the Help to Rent database – enables access to information on a regional basis (town/city level) of all available schemes²⁰⁰. Two schemes are outlined for Northern Ireland, but it is clear that information may be out-of-date and not fully comprehensive in terms of what is currently available here.

Training models

7.12 The feedback from young people pointed to the need for support staff who understand the different systems and processes, who are able to help young people threatened with homelessness, to navigate their way. ASCERT piloted a project which provided an Engage Family Support worker, covering salary and programme costs²⁰¹. The project had two main areas; firstly the provision of family therapy with an emphasis on families referred who were at risk of homelessness. Secondly, the provision of training to assist frontline staff engaging with families at risk of homelessness, in the field of systemic practice. This interactive training outlined the complex issues around homelessness and related issues such as mental health, addiction, Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), attachment, traumas and abuse. The training topics included developing an understanding of families as systems, systemic approaches, methods and techniques when working with families and individuals, and reflecting on team process and skills issues. In addition, the training looked at issues relating to family breakdown and understanding transgenerational patterns and the impact of ACE's, as well as the role and significance of the key worker/sector worker and impact on service user outcomes. Aspects of project delivery were delayed because of Covid-19, including sessions with some of the referred clients and the delivery of the online training element for approximately 200 frontline Housing Executive staff. The relatively short time period of just over 4 months meant it was difficult to complete this programme within the timeframe.

The evaluation report noted that training will cover exploring sector workers' needs and the barriers faced when trying to sustain placements or maintain placements within the existing family. Housing Executive frontline training will also cover compassion fatigue and the Covid-19 climate. In addition, further discussion will take place around Housing Executive staff directly referring clients into the project. A collaborative practice day is planned for Housing Executive, PBNI and ASCERT staff to review the work achieved throughout the project and strengthen links and understanding between the organisations.

ASCERT concluded: *What we have learned from this pilot is the necessity for this type of work within this client group. The importance of collaborative work helps ensure that clients' needs are being*

¹⁹⁷ [Rent Deposit Scheme | Simon Community Scotland \(simonscotland.org\)](https://www.simonscotland.org/)

¹⁹⁸ [Deposit guarantee scheme | Scottish Borders Council \(scotborders.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotborders.gov.uk/)

¹⁹⁹ [Deposit guarantee scheme - East Ayrshire Council \(east-ayrshire.gov.uk\)](https://www.east-ayrshire.gov.uk/)

²⁰⁰ [Help to Rent Database \(crisis.org.uk\)](https://www.crisis.org.uk/)

²⁰¹ Information from ASCERT Engage Final Report NIHE 2021.

correctly identified and supported therefore helping them avail of supports that remove the barriers which are placing them at higher risk of homelessness. In the case of this project these barriers were mainly previous trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences and substance misuse. In being able to address these issues clients were able to better their own circumstances and progressively make positive changes while strengthening the relationships they have with family to help sustain positive change and support. The modified method of delivery that included the therapeutic key work role has been a massive success and provided great stability to those who engaged. If the project had been over a longer period of time, we would have been able to show more impact across a larger group. That said the structure and referral path is now well established to identify and support this client group²⁰².

7.13 Particular reference should be made to current and ongoing work by homeless service providers across Northern Ireland, in terms of investment in the training and development of their staff. It is widely recognised, and the findings from this research support the fact that young people experiencing homelessness have a range of complex issues that require support. Organisations provide staff with a range of training, that includes (but is not limited to), needs and risk assessment, child and adult safeguarding, support planning and de-escalation skills when supporting complex clients. Many organisations offer induction training, refresher training, an annual bespoke training calendar, and link in with other training providers to ensure staff have the appropriate skill set.

As part of the Supporting People Quality Assessment Framework and RQIA's inspection against the Standards for Young Adults Supported Accommodation Projects in Northern Ireland (DOH, 2012) the training of staff is examined, ensuring that staff are both adequately trained and supported. A key developing practice within homeless services in Northern Ireland and across the UK over the past several years has been the development of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE). This approach was developed in response to the recognition that the homeless population have and continue to experience a range of complex needs, including mental health issues, chaotic lifestyles, trauma and rejection. The drive for a PIE *"is to help staff understand where these behaviours are coming from and therefore work more creatively and constructively with challenging behaviours."*²⁰³ There is also recognition that *"these complex and interrelated issues can be highly challenging for support services, even more so in the homelessness sector where most staff do not have clinical training. People experiencing homelessness are 'among those most in need of psychologically informed help, but are also among those least able to access mainstream psychological therapy services.'*"²⁰⁴

7.14 The need for the right type of training and approach, in working with people who are homeless (including young people) is emphasised at a high level throughout the UK jurisdictions, in Government documents. For example, the Scottish Government in *Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan (2018)*²⁰⁵ points to the importance of training both frontline workers and those working

²⁰² Information from ASCERT Engage Final Report NIHE 2021.

²⁰³ No One Left Out, *Creating a Psychologically Informed Environment Implementation and Assessment* (2015), page 2.

²⁰⁴ Keats, Helen, Maguire, Nick, Johnson, Robin and Cockerell, Peter (2012) Psychologically informed services for homeless people. Southampton, GB, Communities and Local Government (Good Practice Guide) in An introduction to Psychologically Informed Environments and Trauma Informed Care Briefing for homelessness services, Homeless Link, Produced by The Innovation and Good Practice Team, published March 2017.

²⁰⁵ [Ending Homelessness Together: High Level Action Plan \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/ending-homelessness-together-high-level-action-plan)

across different disciplines, in the most appropriate way in order to assist those experiencing homelessness. The report states: *We must ensure that the frontline workers working directly with people experiencing homelessness, who often have the deepest insight into people's needs, are well-resourced and supported through training and access to the right resources....It is our ambition to work with colleagues across the public sector – and particularly with health, justice and social work – to develop and implement appropriate training and support for all those who come into contact with people experiencing homelessness or those at risk of homelessness.*²⁰⁶

7.15 Information on training models for working with young homeless people is clear on the websites of organisations working directly in this field e.g. Centrepoin, St Mungo's, the Rock Trust. The Rock Trust has provided organisations including MACS with Housing First for Youth training, and MACS have now passed on that training to their own staff as well as staff in the HSC Trusts and the NI Housing Executive. In addition, peer mentoring²⁰⁷ is mentioned as one mechanism for working directly with young homeless people, with relevant training and support being key to this type of provision.

Personal development models

7.16 The Housing Executive has supported a number of schemes aimed at empowering and equipping young people, who are at risk of homelessness, through personal development programmes. The Welcome Home project by Resurgam²⁰⁸ focussed on three areas of action including their Empowering Youth programme, improving awareness of homelessness factors and partnership working for early interventions for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The project was delivered through young people engaging with their wider services including their own accommodation (the Welcome House) and accommodation provided by other organisations and the wrap-around service provided by Resurgam.

A key objective of the project was to assist young people in gaining qualifications and skills which would enable them to enter the employment market and avail of volunteering, training and educational opportunities; Resurgam referred to this as providing opportunities for incubation of ideas for training or employment. The project produced the following outcomes:

- 18 young people completing an OCN in Youth Leadership;
- 12 young people completing an OCN in Cultural Diversity;
- 12 young people supported to be placed and become trainees in six Social Enterprises and local businesses;
- 4 young people availed of entrepreneurship incubation start-up support;
- 64 young people recognised for their achievements in the programme.

Overall 72 young people engaged in the project who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Other aspects of project delivery included pre-crisis intervention in the form of advice and mediation,

²⁰⁶ Ibid, pages 17 and 31.

²⁰⁷ Peer mentoring where young people with lived experience of homelessness are trained to support young people threatened with or experiencing homelessness.

²⁰⁸ Information from Resurgam Community Development Trust's Project Evaluation Report 'Personal Development Model' – October 2020 – March 2021.

as well as ongoing wrap-around support and the engagement of support from external agencies e.g. Lisburn Foodbank, SPRING Social Prescribing and Trauma Informed support etc.

7.17 Another project under the heading of personal development related to the MACS Tenancy ready and Shared tenancy pilot²⁰⁹. A total of 38 participants took part in the programme, aimed at accommodating young people in shared tenancies; during the time period 20 young people were accommodated, with the remaining 18 waiting to be matched, waiting for properties for their matching or in some cases young people who were no longer requiring this accommodation option. In terms of the 20 young people now in a shared tenancy in 18 cases this was in a 2-bedroom Housing Executive single let, with two young people accommodated in a private rental tenancy.

One key aspect of the pilot project was to provide a matching service, identifying suitable housemates. MACS noted in the evaluation report that the success of this is evidenced by the longevity of the tenancies to date. Young people have been referred from accommodation providers such as MACS, Barnardo's, Belfast Foyer, Flax Foyer and the young people's team at the Housing Executive. The pilot scheme also produced a modular based Tenancy Ready Programme designed to help young people develop the skills and knowledge they need to manage a tenancy and a Shared Tenancy Handbook. For the purpose of the Shared Tenancy pilot, the Young Person's Outcome Star was utilised as the assessment tool.

Accommodation was identified as the main support need at point of referral and a key outcome has been that all the young people referred have been accommodated through the service. Ten young people identified work and learning as a support need and eight young people have improved in this area. We identified that the use of the MACS bursary was an important factor in this and as such, with agreement from the Housing Executive, reallocated some of the project funding to support access to training or education. Support was also provided to access medical services and all the young people in the pilot said they had maintained or improved their mental health since moving into shared accommodation.

MACS noted: *The project has been a huge success. Most young people report to feel at home in their new properties and are happy with their housing areas and housemates. Most young people are feeling less isolated with their housemate and a few are happy to live harmoniously sharing bills and cleaning. The matching process has been key to the success.*

Other factors contributing to the success of the project include the fact that the young people referred to the service were defined as being 'tenancy ready' and they had experience of paying bills in supported accommodation. In addition, MACS pointed to the involvement of the Housing Executive's Young People's services in promoting the service as a housing option to young people, in identifying referrals and in sourcing single let accommodation for use in the pilot. MACS noted that the benefits of single lets for the young people have included the fact that the rental rate is cheaper, young people are not committed to a long-term contract which affords flexibility, they remain on the Housing Executive waiting list and if they receive an offer, can take it without breaking their contract which would be the case if they lived in private rentals. The single let option also allows the individual young

²⁰⁹ Information from MACS Final Report: January 2021.

person to be responsible only for their half of the rent and not the other half should their housemate move on.

7.18 First Housing Aid & Support Services (FHASS) developed a partnership with Business in the Community, using funding from the Big Lottery. The purpose of the 3-year #WorkitOut project was to address the barriers to education and training experienced by young homeless people. The project recognised the barriers experienced by young homeless people, not least poor educational attainment, adverse health issues, low confidence and self-esteem and estrangement from family. Business in the Community provided their expertise in terms of their established links with employers in the field of training and employment. The project took place between 2017 and 2020, providing each participant with an individual plan for their education, training and employment, tailored to their needs and interests, as well as the provision of mentors for the young people to engage with. The overall aim of the project was to move 75 young people from NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Through this project FHASS found that it took a long time for those young people with ACE to trust and build relationships, and that mental health and substance misuse were particular barriers to motivation. In addition, there was a good take-up in terms of education and training, but more limited with preparation for employment because of the impact of Covid-19 on project delivery. Other barriers noted related to the fact that employment for many young people centres around low wages and/or Zero hours contracts, and this combined with the level of benefits, in particular for young people in supported accommodation, lowered the incentive to work.

7.19 A review of information available online highlighted a number of similar personal development approaches, to those adopted by Resurgam and MACS. A scheme aimed at helping young people to become 'tenancy ready', called 'Renting Ready' was developed by Crisis²¹⁰. This tenancy training course is aimed at those who are homeless, at risk of homelessness and with limited experience of independent living; the course is not exclusively for younger people. The course is also aimed at organisations supporting clients to move on to independent accommodation, with a view to ensuring that the transition is successful. The course covers the broad range of topics aimed at ensuring that a person is ready to move into their own place, including housing options, rights and responsibilities, living on a limited budget, looking after a property and managing relationships with landlords and housemates. The YMCA also provides tenancy ready training in a number of locations²¹¹. This is an e-learning approach and covers topics such as funding a deposit and thinking about housing options and covers practical topics on income and bills. Similar to provision in Northern Ireland, these schemes have been developed on the premise that pre-tenancy training reduces the risk of tenancy breakdown and homelessness.

Awareness models

7.20 Another type of model supported by the Housing Executive has been to raise awareness of homelessness and the different support services available. This research study has highlighted that young people may not know where to go or who to seek help from, in relation to their housing and

²¹⁰ [Renting ready | Crisis | Together we will end homelessness](#)

²¹¹ [Tenancy Ready Training | YMCA Housing](#)

support needs. The NI Youth Forum (NIYF)²¹² were funded to deliver the 'Home' project²¹³, building on their previous and existing work with young people at risk of homelessness. A key element of the project, based on established need, was the capital development of counselling and therapeutic space and a drop-in facility at NIYF, with a key focus of working directly with young people at risk of homelessness. In addition, the project enhanced washing/showering and cooking facilities, in order to support young people in extreme need. The project evaluation commented on the importance of a safe space for young people, and its connection to homeless prevention. They noted: *Young people have highlighted the need for a relationship with qualified youth workers as the starting point and how these relationships can open doors to other opportunities which build capacity, sense of belonging, self-esteem and play a significant role in homelessness prevention.*

The evaluation report highlighted the impact of Covid-19, noting an exacerbation of the current mental health crisis for young people, together with a -5-fold increase in the need for temporary accommodation for young people. In a survey conducted during the Covid-19 period, NIYF found that 10% of the 4,000 young respondents selected food, feeling unsafe at home, housing rights and homelessness as one of the top issues facing them imminently at the time of surveying. Furthermore NIYF noted that mental health, benefits and housing advice were identified as the top three areas for homeless intervention according to young people. However, young people indicated that they did not know where to go for help in these areas, they were embarrassed or worried about seeking help and many struggled to get any help at all.

Project funding also covered an element of therapeutic work with young people at risk of homelessness. This included services such as intense one to one listening, advocating to statutory services, therapeutic support and counselling services and signposting to voluntary organisations. The evaluation report noted that 247 individuals benefitted from these services, with 212 receiving sustained one to one support. A total of 107 were assisted to sustain existing accommodation, 13 to access temporary accommodation and 24 to access permanent accommodation. Participants also benefitted from support to manage physical health (185) and mental health (122) as well as help with accessing relevant benefits and financial advice, and accessing employment and education.

In commenting on the output and outcome from this funded project NIYF noted: *We have provided support advice and advocacy services for those who are homeless or vulnerably housed. This has been priceless and, in some situations, 'life saving'. And in terms of the provision of a new physical space: This project will have massive long-term impact on homeless prevention work. The investment in the physical space should not be underestimated.*

Other findings from the evaluation of their project, which relate specifically to homelessness include:

- independent living skills, budgeting, and financial barriers are all raised as ongoing needs. Young people have spoken about being 'handed a key' and being expected to be able to live independently with little or no support. Economic hardship, the impact of universal credit and

²¹² In addition, the NIYF is involved in ongoing awareness work on youth homelessness, including the production of two Pinball videos and other films on housing related issues that are important to young people.

²¹³ Information from NI Youth Forum, Homeless Prevention Fund – End Project Evaluation, April 2021.

the benefit system are key stressors for young people. Education and job opportunities have been suggested by young people as potential solutions;

- Young people spoke about the need for ongoing support; and identified the impact of a peer led approach where service users engage with highly trained youth workers and other young people with similar lived experiences.

7.21 Another model developed under the theme of homelessness awareness was The Pause Project²¹⁴. Lisburn YMCA delivered this project comprising a 12 session Group work programme (over a 3-month period) with a 2-day residential looking at homelessness. This project was targeted at young people, and in particular those most at risk in the younger age groups; nine participants were aged less than 16 years of age, ten were aged 16 – 17 and six were aged 18 – 25.

The programme covered topics including what is homelessness, emotional health and well-being. In particular the young people looked at the reasons why young people become homeless, what support is available to young people, the benefits and challenges of living at home, and thinking about their own risk-taking behaviours and how to keep themselves safe. A key part of the programme was visiting a hostel and hearing about Floating Support services; to help the young people understand the impact of addictions on relationships and how this can lead to homelessness. The programme also looked at what skills would be needed to live independently including budgeting.

Outcomes for the young participants included:

- One individual was supported to access services to make them feel secure in their own home;
- Three individuals reported a reduction in isolation as a result of the project;
- 18 participants were supported to manage their physical health;
- 25 participants were supported to manage their mental health.

Data outlined in their end of project evaluation strongly suggested that participants had a deep understanding of the complexity of homelessness issues, their origins and triggers and where to seek help for these. Lisburn YMCA were positive about the project, particularly the opportunity to have sustained engagement with young people for up to six months, thus providing the opportunity to fully address subjects, issues and behaviours. They also suggested the need for continuation and broadening of this work which would enable them to:

- develop peer educators or champions among our regular groups
- raise awareness of homelessness among other young people at risk in schools, colleges and training organisations
- connect with mental health services for young people
- signpost specialist services for young people on the verge of homelessness
- work with the parents of vulnerable young people

²¹⁴ Information provided by Lisburn YMCA.

7.22 An internet review of UK wide services indicates a spectrum of agencies and organisations providing information and signposting, in some cases specifically for young homeless people and in other cases more broadly for all age groups of homeless people. The Rock Trust²¹⁵, describing itself as Scotland’s youth-specific homelessness charity, provides a range of services including awareness raising amongst young people at risk of homelessness. Their website also provides a gateway into immediate information and assistance (phone numbers and email addresses) on its home page for any young person who thinks they are homeless. Rock Trust also provides services including housing support, a youth development and advice service, mentoring and peer mentoring opportunities, a rent deposit scheme and Housing First for Youth.

Social Enterprise models

7.23 The Artillery Youth Centre was awarded funding to provide a four-month work placement for two young people registered as homeless or at risk of homelessness. This was delivered via the Bosco Café in Newry²¹⁶, and involved 8 hours per week working together with ongoing training and accreditation covering job training, food hygiene and first aid. The project recruited two young women, both aged 18 years old and with a direct link to or experience of homelessness. The job training in the Bosco Café involved a scheduled programme of learning that included baking, food hygiene, sandwich making, customer service, cooking, cleaning; and food preparation. The young people also undertook a project looking at the issues around homelessness, intervention programmes to address the issue and created workbooks for the OCN Level 1 in homelessness awareness with a plan to deliver it to groups of young people from within Artillery Youth Centre when it is safe to do so. The outcomes were excellent for both participants; one has gone on to full time education and the other was offered on-going employment at the Bosco Café and works there 2 days per week. The theme of this programme of activity – using social enterprise models to provide training and employment opportunities for young homeless people links directly to the findings in this research, where young people themselves said they want to be busy and occupied in a positive way.

7.24 Although more difficult to identify specific social enterprise projects targeted at young homeless people, the components of training and employment to address youth homelessness are visible in the other UK jurisdictions. These often have a range of other focus including socially excluded young people, those with disabilities and other needs and not just homelessness, and focus on empowering young people in general. The overall focus of schemes appears to be around providing educational opportunities, access to income and access to employment in order to stabilise housing. One report²¹⁷, *Social Enterprise and Homelessness: What Works? – A brief guide to setting up and running a social enterprise that supports homeless people* (2017) provides some insight into the benefits and pitfalls of setting up and running social enterprises, with the purpose of helping people who are homeless learn new skills and find employment. Some social enterprise models are set within accommodation and support provision for young homeless people. For example, Aberdeen Foyer²¹⁸ runs as a social enterprise, with entrepreneurial activities including Roadwise Driver training and Foyer Graphics (graphic design business).

²¹⁵ [Home - Rock Trust](#)

²¹⁶ Information from Artillery Youth Services, Report to the Homelessness Prevention Fund, April 2021.

²¹⁷ [social enterprise homelessness - practitioners guide.pdf \(socialimpactconsulting.org.uk\)](#)

²¹⁸ [Home | Aberdeen Foyer](#)

7.25 In addition to the social enterprise model as a route into employment, other projects provide young homeless people with support to develop CVs and undertake job interviews. Other more practical help is also available. For example the Employability Fund²¹⁹ associated with the Centrepont End Youth Homelessness movement provides young people with an Employability Bursary, to cover the costs associated with getting into work and education, from course fees to transport fares to a job interview.

Accommodation models

7.26 The Foyer Federation²²⁰ provides an overview of the history, background to and purpose of Foyers. They note: *Foyers provide secure supported housing to young people aged between 16-25. They provide opportunities for personal development and other services that enable young people to reconnect with learning, increase their employability, improve their health and wellbeing, and develop leadership potential. Each Foyer has, on average, 30-40 beds, though some are much bigger and some smaller. Some are independent, and others are owned by housing associations or youth charities like YMCA. The offer and referral criteria from each Foyer might differ depending on its location, size and parent organisation. What links them all together is their commitment to the Foyer model and Advantaged Thinking²²¹.* In general Foyers provide support and services in seven key areas: health, enterprise and employment, learning and skill development, personal development, social skills, financial management and housing and move-on.

7.25 Two Foyers exist in Northern Ireland; Flax Foyer in Belfast operated by North Belfast Housing Association Ltd. and Strand Foyer in Londonderry/Derry provided by Apex Housing Association²²². Details of provision were noted in Section 2. Foyers in general provide more services than generic temporary accommodation. Strand Foyer outlined the range of activities on offer to young people including information sessions on sexual health and healthy relationships, drug and alcohol awareness, mental health and well-being. In addition, there is a gym and cook it training kitchen, and young people can participate in healthy living programmes including personal fitness training sessions and cooking classes. I.T. facilities and Wi-Fi are available free to residents. There are also opportunities for young people to become involved in community events and activities and trips are organised to cultural and historical exhibitions. Both Foyers noted positive outcomes for young people including progression to further and higher education, finding and sustaining employment, moving on to independent accommodation, improved relationships with family, and healthy life and relationship choices. Whilst four Foyers were originally established in the early 2000's, this model of provision has changed significantly in the two decades of operation. Strand Foyer noted: *the Foyer focus is on improving the independent living skills, and employability of the residents. The Foyer supports homeless young people in addressing addiction problems, mental health issues and all aspects of improving their well-being, through in-house and partnership programmes with a range of support*

²¹⁹ [Employability Fund - End Youth Homelessness \(eyh.org.uk\)](http://eyh.org.uk)

²²⁰ [The Foyer Federation](#)

²²¹ Advantaged Thinking is The Foyer Federation's asset-based philosophy. It promotes people's strengths rather than defining them by their deficits. It understands that working towards people's aspirations and dreams is just as important as meeting their immediate needs. The opposite of this is Disadvantaged Thinking. This defines people by their problems, helping them to cope but nothing more. It limits risk and harm but in doing so misses opportunities and breakthroughs. It doesn't prioritise sustainability.

[Our Approach — The Foyer Federation](#)

²²² It should be noted that Malone Foyer does not operate under the Foyer model. It provides temporary accommodation for 18 – 21-year-olds with high support needs.

services. As part of this commitment within a Foyer to education, training and employment, the two current Foyers noted that they have changed and adapted the support provided, in response to the changing support needs of young people (in particular in relation to mental health and substance abuse) and in response to a changing external climate of funding and move-on options. The evolution of the Foyer model in response to the changing needs of young homeless people was also noted by Professor Pleace at paragraphs 3.37 – 3.38.

7.27 The potential for any further Foyer development in Northern Ireland needs to take various factors into account, not least feedback from young people on a preference for smaller site accommodation, with configuration of self-contained accommodation, and whether the model is the best fit in responding to the increasing level and complexity of needs amongst young homeless people.

7.28 As noted earlier the Review of Jointly Commissioned/Funded projects, being undertaken by the HSC Board and the Housing Executive (And due for publication in September 2021), will undoubtedly comment on the current models of supported housing²²³ for young people in Northern Ireland. In looking at good practice for this type of accommodation, it is important to reference the Guidance – *Supported Housing: National statement of expectations* - published by the Department for Work & Pension and the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government in October 2020²²⁴²²⁵. This Guidance also provides some useful case studies; for example Haringey Council’s review of supported housing, which identified a gap in terms of information on LGBTQ+ groups and the need to have a network to champion the needs, experiences and inequalities faced by LGBTQ+ people in the Council area. Based on the review’s findings, the Council also recommissioned their youth homelessness pathways to ensure care leavers can better access youth homelessness services and the wider support needed to sustain tenancies and accommodation²²⁶. Another case study outlined Depaul’s work in England, managing supported housing for around 400 young people across 14 local authority areas. As a result of analysing their staff training needs, in working with this group, Depaul UK supported their housing management workers to complete a 3-day Managing Safely course delivered by an independent training provider and accredited by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health.

7.29 This Guidance also highlighted the additional value for money produced by supported housing. It noted: *As well as helping to improve people’s quality of life by supporting them to live independently, supported housing provides significant benefits to the country and the wider public sector. Every pound spent on supported housing contributes to positive outcomes for individuals, which can lead to more effective use of resources for the NHS, local councils and the wider public sector: for example, through lower health and social care costs, lower pressure on police, probation and prison*

²²³ Supported housing can be defined as projects where accommodation is provided alongside support, supervision or care to help people live as independently as possible in the community.

²²⁴ [Supported housing: national statement of expectations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/92424/Supported_housing_national_statement_of_expectations.pdf)

²²⁵ *The Homelessness code of guidance for local authorities*, Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, (published Feb 2018) also indicates that local councils should review the supply and demand for a range of suitable accommodation including supported housing for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

²²⁶ [Supported Housing final report.pdf \(haringey.gov.uk\)](https://www.haringey.gov.uk/media/10000/Supported_Housing_final_report.pdf)

services and reduced homelessness and rough sleeping²²⁷ This in turn enables these services to deliver better outcomes for vulnerable groups.

7.30 Section 2 also outlined the model of Supported lodgings for young people. These provide temporary and respite options for young homeless people, living in a host's home for a specified period of time. One model in Great Britain is Nightstops, supported by Depaul UK. Nightstops provide homeless people under 25 with free overnight accommodation in the home of a trained volunteer. The objective of the scheme is to provide young homeless people facing a night on the streets or sleeping in an unsafe place, somewhere safe to stay in the short-term. The young person can use the scheme for up to 3 weeks and might stay with the same host or different hosts during this time. They get their own room, use of a bathroom and washing machine, and meals. Communities and charities run Nightstop services in more than 30 locations around the UK, led and supported by the Nightstop team at Depaul UK. In 2019, volunteers provided 9,103 safe nights of accommodation to 937 people across the Nightstop network²²⁸. The Nightstop Impact report²²⁹ highlighted the significant impact on a young person of a stay with Nightstop including improved personal safety, improved sleep quality and ability to eat healthily, together with the opportunity for the young person to be more motivated to make positive change and giving them time and space to think about the future. In addition, mediation is delivered where appropriate and some young people are supported back home, after a period of 'breathing space' for the different parties.

7.31 Housing First for youth has already been referenced in Section 2 (developments by Simon Community NI) and in Section 3 looking at relevant literature and developments. An external evaluation of the Simon Community Scheme²³⁰ noted that since 2018 the service has supported seven young people to successfully secure and maintain their accommodation, with extensive input of support ranging from media support (phone calls and texts multiple times per day), activities and safeguarding interventions. A notable achievement for three young people was engagement with education despite their high support needs.

In particular Section 3 referenced Housing First for youth developed and managed by the Rock Trust²³¹. Their evaluation report examined the 31-month pilot project which started in September 2017. A total of 12 young people aged between 17 and 20 were referred to the project; all were care experienced and some also had experiences of homelessness. All of the young people had experienced some level of childhood trauma and most had experienced abuse. In addition, most had previous or current issues with alcohol and/or drugs, half presented with mental health issues and four were at risk of self-harming. The evaluation report highlighted positive project outcomes; 11 of the 12 young people maintained their tenancies successfully over the pilot period, some with planned move on, and the one individual who chose to leave their tenancy continued to engage with the project. Overall, the participants valued the 'stickability' of the model, recognising that the

²²⁷ Ashton T and Hempenstall C (2009), [Research into the financial benefits of the Supporting People programme](#), Department for Communities and Local Government.

²²⁸ [VOLUNTEER Homeless people need help - Nightstop - Depaul UK \(depaulcharity.org\)](#)

²²⁹ [Impact-report-Nightstop-2018-19.pdf \(netdna-ssl.com\)](#)

²³⁰ Flexible Outreach Service, Evaluation Report, Part 2, Dr. Olinda Santin.

²³¹ Blood, I. et al (2020) *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report* Rock Trust and Housing First Europe Hub <https://hfe.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Rock%20Trust%20HF4Y%20Evaluation%202020.pdf>

relationship was not time-limited or attached to where they lived. Evaluations of pilots of Housing First for youth can provide important lessons for service development in Northern Ireland.

7.32 Another factor emerging from the feedback from stakeholders and young people in this research study related to the need for projects providing accommodation and/or support for young people with very complex needs. The Flexible outreach model provided by the Simon Community NI works with young people aged 16 – 19 years with very complex needs, and supports them to maintain independent community-based accommodation, with the provision of support on a 24/7 basis. Whilst dealing with lower-level support needs, the MACS shared tenancy model (outlined earlier in this Section) enables young homeless people to maintain accommodation in the community, often with further support from the MACS Floating Support service.

Other sharing arrangements are available in the private rented sector, albeit not specifically for young homeless people. The option of ‘room share’ can be organised informally (between friends and social networks) or more formally through portals such as RoomMatesUK.com²³² and SpareRoom.co.uk²³³. However, this provision is more focussed on students and young professionals, who need accommodation as a result of moving to study or for employment, and for those who are financially able to access this tenure. In addition, this provision is often geographically specific and more frequently in large cities, and less suitable for vulnerable young people because of factors such as the cost and money required upfront, together with their additional support or complex needs and not knowing who they are sharing with.

Support models

7.33 Section 2 outlined the provision of Floating Support for young homeless people in Northern Ireland, by HSC Trust area and in terms of overall numbers of units. The number and diversity of Floating Support providers, including HSC Trusts and external providers, indicates that the Floating Support model has already been well-developed and rolled out in Northern Ireland. In addition, other support services exist in the community providing a range of services to those aged 18 plus. For example, the Extern Multi-Disciplinary Homeless Support team²³⁴ in Belfast provides low threshold engagement with people with complex and multiple needs, on the edge of homelessness or already homeless. The service adopts a harm reduction ethos, multi-disciplinary approach including nursing, social work and floating support. The latter includes two social workers who provide tenancy sustainment and support services to individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who have complex needs²³⁵.

Evidence in the rest of the UK suggests that Floating Support is provided geographically at local authority level, and in some cases through region-wide provision. For example, the Single Homeless Project (SHP)²³⁶ works across all 32 London boroughs, providing what they refer to as tenancy support and One Housing²³⁷ is a large-scale provider of floating support in the South East of England,

²³² [RoomMates UK | Flatshare, Houseshare & spare rooms to rent](#)

²³³ [SpareRoom for flatshare, house share, flat share & rooms for rent](#)

²³⁴ [Multi-Disciplinary Homeless Support Team | Extern: Transforming Lives Transforming Society](#)

²³⁵ Criteria include diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health, substance misuse, physical health issues, offending backgrounds, learning disability and family issues.

²³⁶ [Single Homeless Project \(shp.org.uk\)](#)

²³⁷ [Home | OneHousing](#)

supporting around 3,000 people at any one time (range of needs including homelessness). Research in England and Wales for the Department of Communities and Local Government²³⁸ produced a list of good practice action points for the delivery of floating support services. Whilst much of this is already incorporated into good practice, it is worth highlighting a number of factors relevant to this research study. Firstly, good practice around the assessment of needs being person-centred and holistic in nature, identifying any other support needs and service requirements. Secondly, that Floating Support services should broker access to services on behalf of service users and support them in using such services. Thirdly, that the duration of support should be needs led and not based on arbitrary time limits.

²³⁸ *Research into the effectiveness of floating support services for the Supporting People programme Final Report*, October 2011, DCLG. [The-Effectiveness-of-floating-support-for-the-Supporting-People-Programme.pdf \(civis.co.uk\)](#)

Introduction

8.1 This research, commissioned by the Housing Executive, has provided an in-depth and critical analysis on the theme of *Experiences of Youth Homelessness*. Through a multi-method approach the study included a review of wider research, literature and policy context, quantitative analysis of existing secondary data, and collection, collation and analysis of primary data with a range of stakeholders and young people (including homeless young people and those who are care experienced). The research study was undertaken by Fiona Boyle with a literature review provided by Professor Nicholas Pleace, Housing Centre, The University of York. This report has provided insight into the following:

- the trends, causes and nature of homelessness experienced by people aged 16-25 in Northern Ireland;
- the range and effectiveness of homelessness prevention initiatives aimed at young people (including those in other jurisdictions);
- the challenges in delivering services to young people facing homelessness, including those associated with providing ‘move on’ options for young people who are in hostels and tenancy ready, and the challenges involved in inter-agency working, and how these challenges might be mitigated to promote effective delivery of homelessness services and solutions.

8.2 The overall aim of the research was to understand the experiences of young people in relation to homelessness. The 29 young respondents came from a range of backgrounds and service/accommodation experience including current and past service users of temporary accommodation provision and those using external or other types of service, e.g. transitional accommodation for care leavers including supported accommodation and the GEMS scheme, young people’s accommodation, generic temporary accommodation, non-standard accommodation and Floating support services etc. Stakeholder respondents included Housing Executive personnel and those working with young people (homeless and/or care experienced) from the five HSC Trusts and the community/voluntary sector (representing a wide range of client groups relevant to youth homelessness including homelessness per se, interconnections to mental health and addictions (drug or alcohol), ‘looked after’ children and young people and leaving care services.

Key Findings

8.3 **Sections 2 and 3** of the research report provide valuable background in order to understand the landscape and complexities relating to youth homelessness in Northern Ireland. Section 2 reflects on the relevant legislation, noting that there is no separate stand-alone definition to cover youth homelessness per se. Homelessness is experienced in a number of ways and can include those with no accommodation they can reasonably occupy, those in temporary accommodation, those sleeping temporarily at a friend's house (sofa surfing), those living in unfit dwellings, those sleeping rough and those threatened with homelessness. Relevant areas of the Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988 (and subsequent updated legislation - the Housing (NI) Order 2003 and the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010) are outlined, together with relevant parts of the Children (NI) Order 1995 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2002 provided guidance in terms of entitlement for homeless applicants who are in need and vulnerable. In addition, Section 2 outlines relevant case law and the Regional Good Practice Guidance which references the interconnection between the HSC Trusts and the Housing Executive.

8.4 **Section 2** also outlines relevant research on youth homelessness in Northern Ireland; in particular making connections between the care system and homelessness, together with other significant factors including mental health difficulties, self-harm, childhood abuse and Adverse Childhood Experiences etc. The two most recent homelessness strategies in Northern Ireland are noted, with highlights of particular references to youth homelessness, together with wider policy context relating to the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts/Board.

8.5 A key focus of **Section 2** was to develop an understanding of three groups of young people with particular pathways into homelessness, and where particular responses would be appropriate. The three groups are:

- Group 1** Young people who have been within the care system prior to the age of 16, and then become homeless at some later point;
- Group 2** Young people aged 16 or 17 years old, who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system, but who present as homeless;
- Group 3** Young people aged 18 – 25 years old, who present as homeless.

8.6 **Section 2** also provides a comprehensive review of the range and types of services including accommodation-based and floating support services available to young homeless people, with descriptions of the different options and an indication of how these are provided and numbers of units etc. These include Jointly Commissioned Supported accommodation projects, the GEM scheme, the STAY Supported Lodgings Service, the Housing First for Youth Service, bespoke temporary accommodation for young people (including young people's hostels, Step-Down and Foyers), generic temporary accommodation hostels for adults, non-standard accommodation and floating support services. Reference was also made to permanent tenancies in the social rented and private rented sectors.

8.7 In **Section 3** Professor Nicholas Pleace provided an evidence review of youth homelessness in a UK context, looking initially at defining 'youth' homelessness and the transition from childhood to adulthood and the various reasons for young people becoming homeless when there is no parental

safety net in place, for whatever reason. This section pointed to evidence suggesting that the pathway into youth homelessness is often a process rather than a single event, frequently with a connection to 'sofa surfing' and a wide range of other background factors. Analysis by Pleece also concentrated on a review of causal factors in youth homelessness, looking at risk factors and how youth homelessness can be predicted. Pleece also examined the range of barriers to exiting youth homelessness, with particular reference to factors including mental health, addiction, poor physical health and multiple and complex support needs. In addition, barriers may include limits to personal resources and lack of family supports. The theme of preventing youth homelessness completes this section, concluding that: *the key to effective prevention of youth homelessness lies in ensuring that the transition from childhood to young adulthood does not happen in an unplanned way, without the proper supports being in place.*

8.8 **Section 4** provided an overview of the numbers of young people in the three groups looked at in this research study. In mid-2020 there were 463,444 children and young people up to the age of 18 in Northern Ireland, with 4.8% of these known to Social Services (22,414 children). A proportion of these were on the Child Protection Register (2,298) and in the care of the HSC Trusts (3,383) as a looked after child. The research highlighted a 3% increase in the number of children in care, noting that this is the highest number recorded since the introduction of the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. In addition, the research highlighted that the majority of children in care are accommodated in foster care placements (79%) with only 6% in residential care and 5% in other placements such as living independently in the community with support before the age of 18 years. Discharges from care (746 in the year ending 31 March 2020) have a range of outcomes including 50% returning to live with parents and 12% being adopted. The study highlighted other outcomes including living with other family members and continuation of foster care arrangements beyond the age of 18. A proportion of young people are discharged from care into their own independent living arrangements (5%), with 11% moving into other types of accommodation including hostels and B&Bs. Any of these young people, who had been care experienced, who then became homeless were defined as being in Group 1.

8.9 The analysis of secondary data also provided numbers in relation to Group 2 young people, that is those aged 16/17 years old who have no current interface with Social Services or the care system, but who present as homeless. The research indicated from HSC Trust/Board data that the numbers falling into this group have decreased steadily over the last five years from 160 presenters in 2016/17 to 86 in 2020/21. A reduction in Group 2 presenters was particularly evidenced in the Belfast, Northern and Western HSCT areas, with numbers remaining relatively consistent over the 5-year period in the Southern and South Eastern HSC Trust areas. The analysis noted that this reduction (of the number of young people aged 16 and 17 presenting as homeless) should be set against the backdrop of the increase in numbers of children and young people coming into care. The analysis also highlighted that these young people were largely coming from the family home (prior to presenting as homeless) and that around three quarters were previously known to the HSC Trust. Data analysis also indicated that the majority of these presenters returned to the family home, suggesting that only small numbers moved into temporary accommodation including Young People's Supported accommodation projects.

8.10 **Section 4** also provided some analysis, based on Housing Executive data sets, of the numbers of young people in Group 3, that is young people aged 18 – 25 years who present as homeless (whilst also recognising that some young people may previously have been in Groups 1 and 2). This analysis indicated a reduction in the total number of young single presenters (aged 16 – 25 years) to the Housing Executive over the last five years, from a total of 3,195 in 2016/17 to 2,876 in 2020/21. In addition, the total number of FDA acceptances for single young people aged 16 – 25 years declined over the 5-year period from 1,620 in 2016/17 to 1,428 in 2020/21. The data also shows that several of the reasons for homelessness are consistently and disproportionately higher amongst young presenters (over the 5-year period). These are the young person was previously in care, breakdown of sharing or family dispute, intimidation, no accommodation in Northern Ireland and release from institution. Further analysis noted that the number of young single males presenting appears to have decreased more rapidly than females and other age groups. This may be because young males may perceive that there is little point in applying as they will not be awarded FDA status. In addition, the decline in applications from and acceptances of single males and females aged 16 – 17 years may in part be attributed to improved working between the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts.

8.11 Overall this section suggested that whilst the number of children and young people accepted into care has been gradually increasing over the last 20 plus years, from a positive perspective there have been reductions in the last five years in terms of the numbers of young people in Groups 1, 2 and 3 being examined in this research. This secondary data however cannot identify the reason(s) for these trends and patterns; other qualitative data suggests that this may be due to a combination of factors including young people making their own arrangements because they know they will not be awarded FDA status, a positive impact of better working relationships between the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts, a potentially positive impact of preventative work on the part of the Housing Executive and homeless service providers and in the last 18 months the potential impact of Covid-19 on presentations and service delivery.

However, on a more negative note this section highlighted an upward trend in terms of the total number of placements of young people per year in temporary accommodation, with particular increases in the use of external and voluntary sector hostels and to a lesser extent, private single lets. The final year recorded (2020 – 2021) showed a significant increase in overall placements, but this was referenced as being due directly to accommodation requirements during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Housing Executive noted factors relating to the capacity within hostels because of social distancing and/or self-isolation and the necessary mitigations including the use of additional single lets, block booking arrangements for non-standard accommodation and the use of vacant Housing Executive properties for temporary accommodation. In addition, the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on household bubbles and the subsequent consequences in terms of people seeking alternatives to staying in their current household was also noted.

The Housing Executive summarised the impact on homelessness of the Covid-19 pandemic, citing a reduction in presentations alongside an increase in demand for temporary accommodation, with more pressures caused by a reduction in throughput from temporary accommodation because of fewer social housing allocations during the pandemic. They also noted the clear impact on single households and young people; for the latter the number of placements in Belfast quadrupled between 2019/20 and 2020/21.

In contrast the average length of time young people are in a temporary accommodation placement has been steadily decreasing in each of the three Housing Executive Regions since 2016 – 2017, with an accelerated decrease during 2020 – 2021. Other successes in terms of young homeless people were evidenced by data provided by Supporting People which demonstrated for 2019/20 a 78% success rate in supporting clients to achieve independent living within accommodation-based services and a 100% success rate within floating support services. And finally, the report considered the increased levels of repeat homelessness, noting that singles represent the largest group of repeat presentation, although an age breakdown was not available.

8.12 **Sections 5 and 6** outlined the findings from the interview phase; highlighting the fact that youth homelessness is a hard reality for many young people in Northern Ireland today. **Section 5** provided an analysis of the feedback from internal stakeholders (NI Housing Executive) and external stakeholders (including representatives from the five HSC Trusts and other providers in the voluntary and community sector). Their feedback highlighted the following key findings:

- That the main reason for youth homelessness (for three quarters or more of young people presenting as homeless) was family difficulties and sharing breakdown. This was often linked to a change in the family structure, as well as ability to cope with a young person's behaviour and equally a parent's behaviour impacting a young person's option to remain in the home e.g. domestic violence or abuse, parent's mental ill health etc.
- Past trauma and family circumstances were recognised as key reasons for young people in Group 1, together with late entry into the care system (ages 13 – 16 years) and/or a care history characterised by multiple placements;
- A wide range of other factors were noted as background reasons or contributory factors to youth homelessness for all three groups of young people including alcohol and drug misuse, mental health, trauma, poverty and deprivation, generational factors, lack of engagement in services, lack of support networks, links to learning disability and autistic spectrum, loss of accommodation and sexual orientation. The research study concluded that these reasons and contributory factors had a number of impacts as follows:
 - o Firstly, in some cases it meant that the young person was experiencing multiple disadvantages, and this could impact on their inclination and ability to seek out relevant services;
 - o Secondly, that these presenting factors meant that a simple and straight forward solution was not always possible. For example, the complexity of the lack of family support, together with past trauma meant that certain services and accommodation types would be unsuitable to the young person in question;

- Thirdly, that for Housing Advisors, Social Workers, Personal Advisers and providers working directly with the young homeless person, a broad spectrum and depth of knowledge and expertise is necessary. One Housing Executive respondent talked about the need to ensure that Housing Advisors receive training in mental health, addictions, autism, trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE).
- The research study highlighted the most common pathways into youth homelessness, noting sofa surfing with family and friends as a frequent occurrence for young people in Groups 2 and 3, together with a delayed engagement with the relevant statutory services. Estimates suggested that around half of young presenters have sofa surfed for up to a year before presenting as homeless. Two key findings were emphasised in this part of the research; firstly, that given the length of time the young person has been out of the family home, making any attempt to reconcile the young person with their parent(s)/family members becomes more difficult and secondly, that by the time they present to the Housing Executive (or are referred through to the HSC Trust if they are aged 16/17), the young person is in crisis and they literally have nowhere else to go. Both these factors make any preventative or mediation approach more difficult at this point.
- The research study suggested that rough sleeping and street activity was not a major element at the outset of young people's pathways into homelessness; that there was a much higher prevalence of sofa surfing and making other temporary arrangements as opposed to sleeping on the streets. There was however an indication that if the young person's pathway moved towards chronic homelessness, with multiple spells of homelessness and placement breakdown in a period of 12 months, that these young people were more likely to gravitate towards some element of rough sleeping.
- External stakeholders in the research study emphasised the importance of preventing youth homelessness (with a particular focus on the benefits of young people staying in the family home for as long as was possible/feasible), and commented on how best this could be done via early intervention in families and the community, through the education and youth sectors and in changes to how Group 1 young people receive preparation for independence (with a particular focus on young people in residential care settings and being able to manage a tenancy and manage self) and Groups 2 and 3 are supported. The transition between being in care and being in the community was seen as being a vital element in preventing homelessness. Respondents emphasised that whilst the various statutory and voluntary agencies involved with those in care and care leavers are doing their best, the complex presenting and historical issues surrounding individual young people often negatively impact the potential for a successful transition. The need for a more Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) informed approach was emphasised together with suggestions on the time-line for continued support.
- External stakeholders also commented on and made suggestions in terms of challenges in service delivery. These ranged from the suitability of certain types of accommodation options, in particular for young people in Groups 1 and 2, and especially for more complex young people and in relation to the suitability of non-standard accommodation. The study highlighted that interaction between the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts in relation to the Joint Protocol appears to be working well in terms of communication and responding to relevant responsibilities, with referrals coming into the system in an appropriate way via a

single point of entry, and with positive interaction with the Housing Executive via Housing Advisors, with particular reference made to the two Young people's Housing Advisors in the Belfast Housing Solutions team. Various factors were highlighted as potentially requiring further attention; these included how young people who are close to their 18th birthday are dealt with, the 10-day turnaround timescale for making assessments, the number and distribution of assessment beds (with some discussion on the overall number of 12 beds and their geographical coverage), the administrative arrangements for LACing young people aged 16/17 years and the suitability of placement settings for this age group, if supported accommodation is not available/appropriate.

- The research also highlighted via discussions with external stakeholders that whilst those in Group 3 are considered to be adults, and are treated as such under the housing and homelessness legislation, those aged of 18 - 25 years old may have additional needs and vulnerabilities. Concern was recorded about the fact that some young people in this age group delay going to the Housing Executive, and in some cases, in particular single young males, do not present at all, and the fact that many young people in this age group will not fall into any of the priority need categories, and will therefore not obtain FDA status. Furthermore the study concluded that many of these young people in Group 3 who do not have FDA status, but nevertheless are on the housing waiting list for social housing, then experience a long waiting period because of the lack of alternative affordable and accessible move-on accommodation. It was noted that in these cases the individuals non-housing needs may get worse. The study highlighted the positive nature of the portfolio of temporary accommodation for specific groups of young people, but cautioned against the use of generic hostels (because of the interaction with all age groups and other vulnerable people) and non-standard accommodation including single lets and B&Bs for vulnerable young people in Group 3. The need to develop independent living skills and support networks amongst young people in Groups 2 and 3 was acknowledged as being critical to ensuring that these young people are tenancy ready at move-in and also so that they can sustain their tenancy in the longer term.
- The research study highlighted the feedback from external stakeholders which pointed to very limited move-on or permanent housing options for young people in Groups 1, 2 and 3, noting the negative impact on young people in general and also highlighting the knock-on effect this has on young people staying in temporary accommodation when they could easily move on, and the bed-blocking impact this has. Key barriers in both the social rented and private rented sectors were highlighted in the research – including lack of stock, the housing allocation system itself, affordability and in the private rented sector the need to have a deposit and rent in advance as well as a guarantor.

8.13 **Section 6** provided a very vivid analysis of the feedback provided by 29 young people aged 17 to 25 years old who had been or were in Groups 1, 2 and 3. The key findings were as follows:

- Analysis of the reasons for entry into homelessness indicated that these were often complex and multiple, involving relationship breakdown with parents, family or partner. In many cases they were not caused by one single incident but a build-up or series of events. Family relationship breakdown was a central theme, featured as the sole or partial reason for homelessness in 24 of the 29 cases examined. Relationship breakdown or fallout with parents (and step-parents) and adult siblings also seemed to go hand in hand with deeper difficulties

within the family home. This included respondents noting factors such as a lack of family support, that because of overcrowding there was no real space for them in the family home and in some cases that their own behaviour had resulted in a difference of opinion with their parents. In a small number of cases, particularly with young people at the higher part of the age category (ages 24 and 25) there had been a breakdown of a relationship. A number of respondents indicated that prior to becoming homeless they had been in the care system, and they viewed this as being one of the key factors in their reason for homelessness.

- The young research participants highlighted background issues and triggers associated with their journey into homelessness, many of which fell under the heading of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE). These included poor mental health, drug/alcohol involvement (young person and parents), offending history, experience of abuse and a history of Social Services involvement in childhood etc.
- The research highlighted that a high proportion of the young people interviewed had completed education up to the age of 16, and a number had attained recognised qualifications.
- The research indicated that many young people followed a pathway where they did not seek help immediately from statutory services; this was related to their age, a chaotic lifestyle or that they had not known where to seek help or how to do this in terms of skills and capacity. Respondents also indicated a pattern of sofa surfing between wider family members and friends. The impact of this was a lack of consistency over time, short term arrangements which often did not last long, no private space and having nowhere to store their stuff. In addition, it was clear that the pathway into youth homelessness often included multiple and repetitive moves around a circuit of potential places to stay, had a significant impact on the young person's education, training and employment, as well as no fixed place to call home and a lack of stability, security and privacy.
- In reflecting on their own lived experience young respondents indicated different viewpoints on prevention; some said that in their case youth homelessness could not have been prevented whilst others said that something could have been done in their particular experience to prevent their pathway into homelessness. The latter related to points in their early family life and teenage years when support or intervention may have helped. The young people also provided valuable insight into how they thought youth homelessness could be prevented in general, ranging from prevention in home, in particular through early intervention and Social Services input, prevention via the education systems and prevention in the community. Overall respondents suggested that a lot could be done to prevent youth homelessness, and that in many cases minor changes and inputs could act as interventions.
- The research also highlighted the young people's views on how service delivery and inter-agency working could be improved. Factors were noted including lack of knowledge on how to approach the Housing Executive or Social Services and the need for support in interaction with statutory services. The young research participants living in Foyers and young people's accommodation projects including Joint Commissioned Supported accommodation were generally positive about the accommodation and service received, with some small recommendations for improvement. Whilst there were positive comments about generic temporary accommodation hostels (for all age groups) respondents did also indicate that this accommodation was not entirely suitable for their age group and/or their needs. There were

positive comments from those living in the social rented and private rented sectors, alongside recognition that they had needed support to make the move initially and then on an ongoing basis.

- Based on the positive comments about their accommodation, about half of the young people wanted to stay where they were currently living; this reflected on factors such as feeling settled and that the accommodation and support was providing them with a level of stability, that they had not in many cases previously experienced. These young people were largely either in young people's accommodation projects (Foyers, supported accommodation for young people and specific young people's projects) or had their own tenancy in the social or private rented sector, with Floating Support.

8.14 This research study also served to highlight the impact of homelessness on young people; this was covered in both **Section 5** (from the perspective of key stakeholders) and **Section 6** (from the perspective of the young people themselves). Analysis of this qualitative information provides stark reading, and can be summarised as follows:

- The research studied highlighted the universal and negative impact of homelessness on young people. Key stakeholders noted impacts including young people experiencing a sense of abandonment, significant deterioration in mental health and decreased self-confidence and self-esteem, a lack of stability and hopelessness and the negative impact of missed opportunities.
- The young research participants reiterated much of what the external stakeholders had noted. From their own personal experience they evidenced a massive impact on their immediate needs and situation, as well as potentially in relation to their future opportunities and life chances. 21 out of the 29 respondents described the impact on their mental health through depression, anxiety and stress, all linked to factors including uncertainty about their future and where they will live. One third of respondents (11) said their homelessness had a negative impact on their physical health including their ability to feed themselves and their eating patterns. Eight respondents commented on a negative impact on their self-confidence and self-worth, whilst similar numbers highlighted missed options and opportunities.
- There was evidence that none of the young people interviewed had avoided a negative impact on their lives; this universal negative impact needs to be acknowledged and taken into account in planning preventative strategies. The unanswered question for all of the young people centred on how this period of time and the situation of being homeless would impact their life in the longer term and translate into a potential negative result in their life chances and opportunities.
- It was also clear from the qualitative quotes that homelessness had a knock-on effect on a number of different aspects of the young people's lives. This included ability to sustain a job, keeping in touch with family and friends, and capacity to sustain education and training. In addition, many of them continued to experience other wider background factors, some of which had been contributory in causing the homelessness, which also fed into their current health status and their overall well-being.
- Findings from the research study indicated that getting settled accommodation, even if this was temporary or transient in nature, invariably led to and was linked to some or considerable positive impact and an improvement in many areas e.g. physical health, stability etc.

Improvements in mental health were clear in many but not all cases, and for many young people this appeared to continue to be a difficulty.

Recommendations

- 8.15 The study provided an opportunity to explore and review preventative delivery models, both in terms of the external literature review (**Section 3**) and the analysis of provision in Northern Ireland (**Section 7**). This approach served to highlight the range of provision under a number of key headings developed by the Housing Executive; these were Intervention models, Training models, Personal development models, Awareness models and Social Enterprise models.

Sections 5 and 6 also provided insight into suggestions from internal/external stakeholders and young people on preventative models and good practice in terms of accommodation and support services. These now form the basis of the recommendations arising from this qualitative research study and cover themes ranging from preventative work, the types and suitability of temporary accommodation, the protocols and arrangements relating to homeless support for different groups of young people and ultimately the need for more accessible and affordable housing options for young people.

Overall and based on the findings of this study we strongly recommend increased and ongoing preventative work, with a focus on ensuring that this can be developed beyond one-year localised projects with longer funding streams and regional project delivery, together with a reduction in reliance on non-standard accommodation and focussed efforts to continue to reduce the length of time a young homeless service user is in temporary accommodation and/or experiences repeat homelessness. In addition, we recommend that the findings of this study are integrated into the relevant Action Plans within the Housing Executive and the HSC Trusts to ensure that youth homelessness is tackled in terms of numbers entering through the various pathways discussed, ensuring those who have been homeless at a young age get the accommodation and support they need, and looking at further developments of specific approaches including for young people with very complex needs and those requiring Psychologically Informed Environment (PIE) interventions and support. In particular we suggest that this theme of youth homelessness is developed in the next 5-year Homelessness strategy for the period 2022 – 2027, and that the findings of this study are used as an evidence base to inform and identify the actions needed.

8.16 Analysis of the stakeholder and young people's feedback pointed to a number of themes around factors that should be integrated and further developed in terms of models aimed at preventing youth homelessness; the following are recommended:

- The negative impact of youth homelessness should be acknowledged and taken into account in planning preventative strategies, e.g. Housing Executive 5-year homelessness strategies;
- To promote the development and take-up of early-stage intervention with parents/family members to avail of services which may assist in positive family interaction, unity and dynamics including parenting skills, dealing with family conflict, appropriate responses to domestic abuse and violence, engagement of appropriate parties in relevant health & social care services and homeless/housing support services;
- To ensure recognition of those providing support to young people who are sofa surfing; with a particular focus on providing input (information, guidance, advice etc.) to wider family members and friends who are providing a 'space' to a young homeless person. In addition, a focus on getting to the 'sofa surfers' at an earlier stage is recommended, so that some level of family mediation may still be an option;
- To further develop early-stage and ongoing interventions as appropriate for young people at risk, including in terms of mental health, alcohol and drug misuse, childhood trauma, learning disability and autistic spectrum
- To consider input and resources for Group 1 young people, with particular focus on those who are late entry into the care system (ages 13 – 16 years), to cover all care settings, and those where there are complex historical trauma issues which need to be resolved and supported during the transition from care. In addition, it is recommended that consideration should be made of cases where the time period/level of support for care leavers could be extended;
- To consider and further develop input to support young people in social and private rented accommodation who are at risk of losing their accommodation e.g. as a result of behaviours and prior to and including at Notice to Quit stages;
- To consider and further develop training and support for those working directly with those threatened with or experiencing youth homelessness, including where appropriate Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) training;
- To consider and implement the further development of information for young people threatened with homelessness, including looking at the readability/accessibility of the information and appropriate and sufficient access points. It is recommended that the interface on the Housing Executive website, for young people searching for information about homelessness, should be reviewed and developed as appropriate;
- To consider the development of the young people's Housing Advisor role (as per Belfast Housing Solutions), together with providing young people with appropriate support in approaching and accessing housing pathways through the different housing tenures;
- To look at the further and ongoing development of preventative programmes in school, college and informal youth settings, focussing on what it means to be homeless, as well as practical preparation for independent living and becoming tenancy ready;

- To consider the development of systems and processes to help young people at risk of homelessness, to stay in their educational setting and complete their education/ qualifications, where possible;
- To look at and respond to levels of overcrowding in social housing, where there are young adults, and how this impacts on the young person's opportunities to remain in the family home. This may include looking at how and at what level overcrowding points are allocated, and how multi-family arrangements in the one household/social housing tenancy could be dealt with differently in the Common Selection scheme.

8.17 In a similar way stakeholder and young people's feedback indicated a number of themes around factors that should be integrated and further developed in assessment processes and for accommodation and support for young homeless people, the following are recommended:

- To examine the best way at an operational level for the Housing Executive to respond to any referrals from 16 and 17-year-olds, with the potential to have more specialist young people's Housing Advisors (as per the Belfast Housing Solutions approach) in other geographical areas;
- To review some aspects of the HSC Trust assessment process with 16 and 17-year-olds, including the length of the assessment period, the level and availability of assessment beds and the number of moves;
- To review the timescale for applying for social housing, looking at any potential leeway in the current stipulation for only 28 days before a young person's 18th birthday;
- To look at further development of a 'chronic homeless' response for those young people who have been homeless over a longer period of time and/or have had multiple placement breakdowns;
- To further explore and develop the use of crisis intervention accommodation including Nightstop, to reduce the pressure on temporary accommodation and to provide a window of opportunity for potential mediation with family and/or return home;
- Based on the findings of the Review of Jointly Commissioned projects, to examine the availability of this type of accommodation, in particular outside of Belfast, and the suitability of accommodation for those with very high and complex needs or for those who need this accommodation for more than two years;
- To look at further development of support for those providing foster placements, including kinship foster care, and for those providing supported lodgings. Consideration of other types of home-based support e.g. potential development of Nightstop model;
- To examine the need for further temporary accommodation hostels/services specifically for young people, in particular for those with challenging behaviours and the potential development of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIE) within both accommodation and services, and taking into account geographical availability. A needs assessment would be required taking into account the different and very specific needs of young people with challenging behaviour, with recommendations around the most suitable type of accommodation and service. This should also take into account young people's preference for self-contained accommodation;
- To review the suitability of some placements including the use of B&Bs and generic all-age temporary accommodation for young homeless people;

- To further explore the option of increasing the intensity at particular points and prolonging the time periods for Floating Support and Step-Down support on a case-by-case basis, to ensure successful retention of tenancy by young people. There is acknowledgement that this does already occur on a case-by-case basis where necessary, but there should be further exploration of the policy position to support linkages with practice;
- To explore the range of realistic permanent housing options for young people, with a view to making them more accessible and affordable e.g. through Rent Deposit and Guarantee schemes, affordable social tenancies, further development of the Shared Tenancy model etc.

8.18 The review of good practice both in Northern Ireland and other UK jurisdictions pointed to the diversity and quality of work already being undertaken in the sector. This research has also enabled key stakeholders, and young people themselves to verbalise what they would like to see more of, and how they would like services to be developed and adapted to meet the needs of young homeless people as outlined above. In addition, it was noted that the evaluation of current preventative services funded by the Homeless Prevention Fund is useful; albeit that there may be room to develop more external and independent evaluation processes and input, to validate that these pilot projects have fulfilled their objectives. A key potential part of this could be an examination of the social return on investment of the impact of these projects and associated spend to save arguments. The review of the current Homelessness Strategy 2017 – 2022, *Ending Homelessness Together* (published April 2017) and the development of a new 5-year strategy for 2022 – 2027, provides the ideal opportunity for the inclusion of new potential models of delivery and to respond to the recommendations in this report. Cognisance should also be taken of the need for long-term regional funding mechanisms rather than one-off and short-term funding which results in an array of local projects with no mechanism for joined up delivery or widespread information provision.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Stakeholder interviews – internal stakeholders (NI Housing Executive) and external stakeholders (including voluntary/community sector providers and the five HSC Trusts)

Type of stakeholder/ Organisation	Position/Area
Internal – Housing Executive	13 respondents
External – Health & Social Care Trusts	Southern HSC Trust
	Western HSC Trust
	South Eastern HSC Trust
	Northern HSC Trust
	Belfast HSC Trust
External - providers	First Housing
	Triangle Housing Association
	Simon Community NI
	Barnardo's
	Action for Children NI
	Belfast Central Mission
	Praxis
	MACS

Appendix 2 Tables - Temporary Accommodation provision – by Council Area

Belfast City Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Simon Community	242 Antrim Rd	10
	Life Housing Northern Ireland	Life House	6
	Belfast Central Mission	Grampian Avenue	6
	MACS Supporting Young People	Supported Housing (Care Leavers) Service	18
	Barnardo's	Leaving Care Service - Belfast	10
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Harmonl	Utility Street Men's Hostel	59
	North Belfast Housing Association Ltd.	Flax Foyer	37
	Simon Community	414 Falls Road - 1	21
	Simon Community	Cliftonville Avenue	20
	Simon Community	3-5 Malone Road	42
	Simon Community	11 – 13 Saintfield Road	21
	Legion Of Mary Regina Coeli	Regina Coeli House	20
	Extern Northern Ireland	The Ormeau Centre	29
	The Salvation Army	Centenary House Direct Access	68
	The Salvation Army	Calder Fountain Resettlement	12
	Queens's Quarter Housing Ltd	University Area	77
	Legion of Mary Morning Star	Legion of Mary Morning Star Hostel	38
	Mind Wise New Vision	Inverary House	12
	East Belfast Mission	Hosford House 2	26
Homeless Families with Support Needs	Depaul Northern Ireland	Cloverhill (Depaul Ireland)	18
	Depaul Northern Ireland	Mater Dei (Depaul Ireland)	13
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Ardmoulin (Belfast)	21
	The Salvation Army	Thorndale Family Centre	38
	The Salvation Army	Glen Alva Family Centre	20
	The Salvation Army	Grosvenor House (T.S.A)	18
	Ark Housing Association	Roseville House	24
	Ark Housing Association	Moyard House - Ark HA	17
	Simon Community	Conway Court	24
	NIHE	New Haven	8
	NIHE	Templemore House	8
People with Alcohol Problems	Rosemount House Limited	Rosemount House/ 294	20
	Apex Housing Association	Springwell House	27
	Council for Social Witness	Grays Court	7
	Depaul Northern Ireland	Stella Maris (Depaul Ireland)	23
Offenders or People at risk of Offending	Extern Northern Ireland	Innis Centre	20
	Extern Northern Ireland	Dismas	14
	Council for Social Witness	Thompson House	19
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	46 Ulsterville Ave	20
	Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	64-68 Deerpark Road	13
Single Homeless Crisis Accommod Service	Welcome Organisation	Annsagate Crisis Accommodation Service	10
	The Salvation Army	Centenary House Night Shelter	21

Derry & Strabane Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Jefferson Court	20
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Francis Street Project (Supported Accom)	8
	Praxis Care Group	Foyle Young People Supported Accommodation Service	4
	Praxis Care Group	Foyle Young People Stepdown Service	15
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	Simon Community-Waterside	33
	Apex Housing Association	The Foyer	48
	North West Methodist Mission	McCrea Chambers	47
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Shepherds View	16
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Dillon Court Homeless, Strabane	38
Homeless Families with Support Needs	NIHE	7 Bradley Park	5
	Clarendon Shelter Ltd	Clarendon Shelter (Service)	18
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Sath Accommodation Service	7
	NIHE	Clooney Mews	10
	NIHE	Seamus Roddy House	8
	NIHE	Drumard Close	9
People with Alcohol Problems	Apex Housing Association	House In The Wells	24
	Apex Housing Association	Foyle Valley House	14
	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Damian House	12
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Foyle Women's Aid	Ashleywood House	15
	Foyle Women's Aid	Rose House	9

Antrim & Newtownabbey District Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Action for Children	NI Supported Lodgings Service	15
Homeless Families with Support Needs	NIHE	Antrim Hostel	3
	NIHE	Loughview House	5
	NIHE	Hillview House	8

Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	Simon Community Avon House	9
	Simon Community	Simon Community Linen Court	29
Offenders or People at risk of Offending	Simon Community	Simon Community 21 Edward Street	20

Causeway Coast & Glens Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Simon Community	Mount Street Mews	15
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	Lodge Road	15
Homeless Families with Support Needs	NIHE	35 Glenvara Drive – Coleraine	5
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Causeway Women’s Aid	Causeway Women’s Aid Refuge	10

Fermanagh & Omagh Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Shelter (NI) Ltd.	SLATE	11
	Action for Children	Rossorry Grove Supported Accommodation	13
People with Alcohol Problems	First Housing Aid & Support Services	Ramona House	8
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Omagh Women’s Aid	78 Old Mountfield Road	6
	Fermanagh Women’s Aid	Fermanagh Refuge	3

Lisburn & Castlereagh Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	MACS Supporting Young People	Lisburn Supported Housing	9
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	2 Flush Park - 1	30
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Belfast and Lisburn Women’s Aid	7 Beechland Way	12

Mid & East Antrim Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Barnardos	Grove Road	5
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	1 Curran Road	18
	Living Rivers Trust	Living Rivers Trust Hostel/8 Linenhall	20
	Simon Community	Millhouse	18
Homeless Families with Support Needs	Larne Community Care Centre	Larne Community Care Centre	4
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Women's Aid Antrim B'mena Carrick Larne & N'abbey	Women's Aid Antrim B'mena Carrick Larne & N'abbey - Carniny Court	13
	Cithrah Foundation	Selah	5
	Women's Aid Antrim B'mena Carrick Larne & N'abbey	Ruth House	6

Mid Ulster Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Belfast Central Mission	Thomas Street, Dungannon	4
	Belfast Central Mission	Tafelta Rise, Magherafelt	13
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Depaul Northern Ireland	Castlehill (Depaul Ireland)	22
	Extern Northern Ireland	MUST Hostel	20
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Mid Ulster Women's Aid	Duffy House	9

Newry, Mourne & Down Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	MACS Supporting Young People	Newry Supported Housing	7
	MACS Supporting Young People	Downpatrick Supported Housing	8
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	63-65 Bridge Street, Newry	17
	Simon Community	14 Saul Street, Downpatrick	8
Homeless Families with Support Needs	NIHE	Glebetown	5
People with Alcohol Problems	Cuan Mhuire (NI) Ltd.	Cuan Mhuire - Supported Living Accommodation (Short Term)	50
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	Women's Aid Armagh Down Ltd	Lyne Lodge	11

North Down & Ards Council Area

Primary Client Group	Organisation Name	Service Name	Units
Young People	Belfast Central Mission	Riverside Place	12
Single Homeless with Support Needs	Simon Community	41-45 Central Avenue - 1	25
Homeless Families with Support Needs	NIHE	Beaufort West Winds	5
Women at Risk of Domestic Violence	North Down & Ards Women's Aid	7/9 Dufferin Ave	7

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