

YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

Making a stand against youth homelessness

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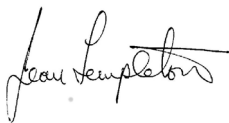
Chair's Introduction

Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP) provides a landmark opportunity for young people who have experienced homelessness to have a collective voice on a national scale; a direct line to Government Ministers and the chance to inform strategy, policy and service development.

As Chair of the Youth Homeless Parliament on 16th December 2013, I was anxious about whether the event would match the anticipation and excitement of the preparation. Would 100 young people who travelled from all parts of the country have the opportunity to be heard, and most importantly, would they be listened to? I knew how hard each group had worked to prepare their manifesto priorities, based on their experience. They had turned those experiences into positive suggestions about how to do things better and be more effective in a period of public sector cuts. Their ambition to help others and develop safer and more effective responses was palpable.

It was a privilege to chair the event and I would like to thank the Members for their contributions and consideration. I would like to thank Ministers for taking as many points and questions as possible and for extending their available time to stay longer and listen to more young people. I would also like to thank partner organisations and members of the steering group as well as DCLG colleagues for their support and engagement with the Youth Homeless Parliament. The test for us all is whether we use the learning to make changes for the better.

Did it meet expectations? Youth Homeless Parliament Members are better placed to answer that.



Jean Templeton
Chief Executive
St Basils

An introduction to the Youth Homeless Parliament

St Basils, a youth homelessness charity based in the West Midlands, who facilitate the National Youth Reference Group (NYRG), were commissioned by The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in May 2013 to facilitate a 'Youth Homeless Parliament' in Parliament.

The National Youth Reference Group

St Basils was well placed to take on the role of facilitating Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP), having facilitated the National Youth Reference Group (NYRG), made up of 45 young people from across England who are or have been homeless, for 6 years.

The National Youth Reference Group have toured the nation hosting workshops advising local authorities on how they can address the needs of homeless young people and make positive changes by ensuring homeless young people are involved in their decision making processes. In partnership with Homeless Link, NYRG also hosted a conference in May 2012, detailing how 'Positive Pathways' could be developed in the key areas of Education, Health, Employment and Housing to prevent youth homelessness happening in the first place and, where it does happen, to ensure young people can recover and regain economic independence.

Aims of Youth Homeless Parliament

The Youth Homeless Parliament's aim is to ensure homeless young people's voices, concerns and ideas are heard, at the heart of government, where it really matters. The Youth Homeless Parliament is made up of 100 young people aged 16-25 from across England who are homeless and currently receiving support from one of the following charities that work with homeless young people: St Basils, Centrepoint, Crisis, DePaul UK, Forum Housing, The Foyer Federation, St Mungo's and YMCA. Each of these charities has put forward 10 of their young people to join the Youth Homeless Parliament. While 20 young people representing NYRG brings the total number of young people taking part to 100, a number which ensures a good representation from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and locations, including more rural communities, from across the country. The Membership and Housing Policy organisation Homeless Link has also provided support to the initiative.

Background

On 13th December 2012, MP for Erdington Jack Dromey invited 100 young people from 7 homelessness charities including St Basils, Centrepoint, Homeless Link, Crisis, Foyer Federation, YMCA and St Mungo's to come together to draw up a 'Homeless Youth Manifesto' to present for discussion to a cross-party panel which not only included Labour MP Jack Dromey but Liberal Democrat MP Don Foster and Conservative Planning Minister Nick Boles. This event made history; it was the first time homeless young people had ever been invited to Parliament to debate directly with ministers. Jack Dromey MP was also keen that the event would help young people dispel some of the stereotypes and myths around 'homeless people'. The young people were invited to vote on their 3 key priorities and collectively they identified these as: 'A Consistent Voice For Young People', 'Tackle The lack of Affordable Quality Housing' and 'Abandon Proposals To Cut Housing Benefit to under 25s'. This successful event led to the announcement in May 2013 by then Housing Minister, Mark Prisk MP that St Basils would receive initial funding to develop the concept further.

The Partnership

St Basils and NYRG with the help of the partner organisations, organise a large event bringing all 100 young people together to meet with ministers in Parliament annually. The first official YHP took place on 16th December 2013. The 100 young people had the opportunity to question ministers on current housing policy and their current plans as well as presenting what they think the top 3 priorities should be. Staff from DCLG also took the opportunity to consult those present on their opinions on a range of housing related matters. Separate to this large annual event, a small group of NYRG members will attend the Ministerial Working Group (which includes a minister for Department for Work and Pensions, Health, Home Office, Education, Department for Business Innovation and Skills as well as DCLG) on a quarterly basis to answer specific questions and present more detailed explanations of some of the points raised at the larger events.



Manifestos

The Youth Homeless Parliament meeting took place on Monday 16th December 2013 from 12.00 Noon until 3.30pm at The House of Commons, Westminster, London.

100 young people aged 16-25 who have experienced homelessness, travelled to Parliament to meet directly with Housing Minister Kris Hopkins MP (Conservative) and Communities Minister Stephen Williams MP (Lib Dems) to express their concerns and share their ideas about how to tackle the issues.

Youth Homeless Parliament members from organisations including, St Basils, Forum Housing, Centrepont, Foyer Federation, St Mungo's, YMCA England, DePaul UK and Crisis and NYRG, attended to deliver their individual manifestos. Youth Members debated and presented their top 3 priorities from their full manifestos to each other and Ministers.

In preparation for the main event Young People took part in workshops around the country to prepare their organisational Manifestos.

The full Manifestos developed by Youth Homeless Parliament Members and presented to Ministers at the House of Commons, Westminster, London 16th December 2013 are included in the following pages. These identify young people's priorities and were developed by young people from the organisations.



Centrepoint Young People's Manifesto

Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Lack of affordable / cost of decent quality housing.

- CPP would like more affordable, secure and quality housing made available.
- Instability around housing is a key factor affecting homeless YP. There is not enough social housing and a lack of long term tenancies. In the Private rented Sector rents are far too high.

b) CPP would like to see Life Skills added to the National Curriculum.

- CPP feel that this could really help prevent youth homelessness as YP will be taught early on about the skills they need to live independently.
- They feel that YP learn too late what skills they need, often once they are already homeless and living in supported accommodation.

c) CPP would like to challenge the perception of homeless young people being benefit 'scroungers'.

- CPP feel that the perception of homeless YP needs to be changed. The language often used to describe YP, including by the government, is negative and presents YP as lazy and apathetic.
- CPP wants to show that homelessness and living on benefits is not a choice but a necessity for most people. By painting a picture of YP as lazy 'scroungers', society is writing off the next generation. It also allows governments to get away with policies that punish YP.

Crisis Young People's Manifesto

Young People's Key Recommendations

- The minimum wage is not a living wage. The lower level of the minimum wage for under 25 year olds doesn't reflect the fact that many young people are not living at home and have to support themselves.
- The Shared Accommodation Rate for under 35 year olds makes it difficult for young people to find somewhere to rent. We are also worried about future cuts to benefits for under 25 year olds.



DePaul UK Young People's Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

DePaul UK helps young people who are homeless, vulnerable and disadvantaged.

- We protect young people by finding them a place to call home.
- We prevent young people becoming homeless by rebuilding family relationships and offering through the gate support to young offenders.
- We provide young people with opportunities to progress beyond homelessness and fulfil their potential.

DePaul UK works in the NE, NW and SE regions. The young people who wrote this manifesto are receiving support from a keyworker and are living either in hostels, move-on accommodation, or their own tenancies in North and South Tyneside and in Manchester.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

- The Welfare Benefits system is obstructive and confusing for people legitimately seeking work or wanting to do qualifications to help them get a job in the future, especially for people aged over 19 years.
- Clear, consistent and accessible information is needed regarding rules and sanctioning.
- People need a safety net when there is a change of circumstances, so that people are not left without money for long periods, resulting in arrears, no heating, and poor nutrition.
- It would be helpful to have a paperless system avoiding evidence going missing at the hands of the Jobcentre, resulting in delays to benefits and frustration. Agencies could talk to each other more.

a) There is a lack of suitable emergency and temporary accommodation for young people in some small towns and rural areas.

- Appropriate accommodation should be available across all geographical areas, and not 60 miles down the road, away from family and friends.
- Hostels should be affordable.
- Waiting lists are long. People need support whilst they are on a waiting list for housing.

b) Once young people move out of hostels into their own tenancies, isolation can soon develop, resulting in mental health problems.

- There should be more transitional properties/move on projects from hostels rather than people having to go straight into a property alone.
- More information should be available on things to participate in – activities and events in the local area, and work experience opportunities, with a budget to help with travel expenses.
- People in similar situations could live more communally, or near each other, so that there is always someone to talk to.

c) Young people lack awareness and information about the consequences of leaving home and about services that support young homeless people.

- Deliver information sessions in schools and colleges - run by people who have had experience of homelessness.
- Educate staff that work with young people in health services/schools/colleges about services like DePaul UK and what they do.
- Publicise information about where to seek advice about entitlements, homelessness and benefits via posters and leaflets in community venues and on public transport.

d) It's hard to be healthy on a tight budget. After taking away TV licence, rent, council tax, toiletries & hygiene products, there is no money left for food, let alone clothing.

- Give young homeless people healthy eating vouchers every month - not just breastfeeding mothers or pregnant women.
- Offer young homeless people affordable gym memberships and vouchers for sports activities, or discount cards like a student card for clothes and activities.

- Offer more advice and information on keeping a healthy diet, including cooking lessons to give people the skills to cook confidently and understand quantities.

e) Homeless young people are too often housed in areas that are inappropriate and unsafe which can result in severe mental health problems and an on-going cycle of homelessness.

- The police need to take anti-social behaviour against vulnerable young people seriously and agencies should work together to protect them and re-house them if necessary.
- Where possible, young people need a second chance to stay in or return to supported accommodation, and a keyworker who understands their background and circumstances.
- Homeless young people with mental health needs should be assessed and given help by professionals before they reach crisis point and not only at the point of crisis. They should not be pushed into work before they are ready.

3. Young People at DePaul UK - Young People's Top Three Priorities:

1. Once young people move out of hostels into their own tenancies, isolation can soon develop, resulting in mental health problems.

- There should be more transitional properties/move on projects from hostels rather than people having to go straight into a property alone.
- More information should be available on things to participate in – activities and events in the local area, with a budget to help with travel expenses.

2. Homeless young people are too often housed in areas that are inappropriate and unsafe which can result in severe mental health problems and an on-going cycle of homelessness.

- The police need to take anti-social behaviour against vulnerable young people seriously and agencies should work together to protect them and re-house them if necessary.
- Homeless young people with mental health needs should be assessed and given help by professionals before they reach crisis point and not only at the point of crisis. They should not be pushed into work before they are ready.

3. It's hard to be healthy on a tight budget. After taking away TV licence, rent, council tax, toiletries & hygiene products, there is no money left for food, let alone clothing.

- Give young homeless people healthy eating vouchers every month - not just breastfeeding mothers or pregnant women.
- Offer young homeless people affordable gym memberships and vouchers for sports activities, or discount cards like a student card for clothes and activities.

We challenge David Cameron and MPs to live in our shoes and live on our benefits for a trial period to fully understand how hard it is.

Forum Housing Association Young People's Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

Forum Housing Association offer a range of high quality units of accommodation for single young people aged 16-25, who are homeless or seeking independence. Forum's units of accommodation are provided within 9 Projects which cater for a range of needs.

All offers of accommodation incorporate a support plan, tailored to the individual's needs.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Young homeless people often have debt

We recommend that:

- More access to advice and guidance to prevent debt
- People in hardship struggling to live to have their interest froze to prevent growing debt

b) Young people who are housed with no benefits struggle to afford to live

We recommend that:

- Faster process of setting up benefits to prevent hardship and borrowing to live
- More access to food banks when starting a benefit claim to feed them in the waiting period

c) Most young people want to work instead of being on benefits

We recommend that:

- More practical help to gain work and earn a wage instead of being on benefits
- More work placements to learn new skills and talents that will help to gain work

d) Homelessness happens 24/7 not 9-5

We recommend that:

- Services need to be more accessible out of hours not just 9-5
- More 24 hour drop-in centres / crash beds and emergency accommodation
- Mediation services that are accessible out of hours

e) More investment in promoting and preventing homelessness

We recommend that:

- A bigger presence of information, advice and guidance at schools, youth centres and community centres
- Have ex-homeless young people to educate people around risk and to talk in schools about the reality of becoming homeless

f) Young people who are homeless often are for reasons

We recommend that:

- Easier access to councillors and mediation to help prevent breakdown with the family
- More access to other services, drug and alcohol, health and intervention services

3. Forum Housing Association – Young People’s Top Three Priorities:

1. Young people are finding it hard to gain work due to experience
 - Help find and gain work to earn an income to come off benefits
 - Encourage volunteering and work placements to gain experience
2. Invest in services that help prevent and support young people out of homelessness
 - More mentors to talk to people at risk of becoming homeless and to share real life experiences
3. Young people need a steady and reliant service
 - Cuts are effecting homeless services to cut back or close invest in the service to prevent reacquiring homelessness problems in the future



The Foyer Federation Young People's Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

The Foyer Federation was established in 1992. Since then, the Foyer network has grown rapidly and now operates in over 120 urban and rural communities across the UK, providing safe, quality assured environments, where experts reconnect up to 10,000 young people each year with personal development opportunities. Our mission is to turn young people's experiences of disadvantage into solutions that support their transition to adult independence.

We develop transformational programmes and campaigns that fill gaps in community services and inspire policy and decision makers to make a more effective investment in young people. The direct experience of young people and those working with them helps inform our understanding of the barriers facing young people and develop new approaches to overcome them.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Government Policy is deficit based looking to fix the "problem" that is young homeless people

3. Funding should be channelled to encourage young people to develop talents and skills

- Restrictions should be from those young people aged over 19yrs who are in supported accommodation.
- All young people in supported accommodation should be able to access training courses and claim support with their housing costs.

b) Vulnerable young homeless people can be pushed through the supported accommodation system too quickly and go on to fail.

- 18 months should be the minimum timescale for a hostel or foyer placement
- Services are stretched to capacity. No further cuts to funding for staff
- Further consultation with young people about realistic timescales for services.

c) Homelessness is often a result of relationship breakdowns

- Young people should deliver training in schools on homelessness and support networks.
- Mediation training in school and young peoples services.
- Funding reintroduced for mediation/ counselling offered in schools and centres which support young people at risk of homelessness
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4. Safe emergency accommodation is not available for young people when they present as homeless.

- Increase the amount of Emergency Beds, Crash Pads and Supported Lodgings.
- More funding available to lease and convert empty buildings for move on accommodation from Supported Accommodation therefore freeing up bed spaces.

e) The benefits system is failing those most in need of it. We want to work but need help whilst we learn the skills needed.

- Do not remove Housing Benefit for those under 25.
- Review schemes for helping young people get into work. Make them offers which offer opportunity whilst inspiring and unlocking the talents of the future
- Invest in young people to develop these essential skills. The savings in the future will outweigh the costs.

3. Foyer Federation – Young People’s Top Three Priorities:

1. Government Policy is deficit based looking to fix the “problem” that is young homeless people

- Funding should be channelled to encourage young people to develop talents and skills
- Restrictions should be lifted from those young people aged over 19yrs who are in supported accommodation.
- All young people in supported accommodation should be able to access training courses and claim support with their housing costs.

2. Vulnerable young homeless people are pushed through the supported accommodation system too quickly and go on to fail.

- 18 months should be the minimum timescale for a hostel or foyer placement
- No further cuts to funding for staff
- Further consultation with young people about realistic timescales for services.

3. The benefits system is failing those most in need of it. We want to work but need help whilst we learn the skills needed.

- Do not remove Housing Benefit for those under 25.
- Review schemes for helping young people get into work. Make them offers which offer opportunity whilst inspiring and unlocking the talents of the future
- Invest in young people to develop these essential skills. The savings in the future will outweigh the costs.



National Youth Reference Group Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

The National Youth Reference Group is made up of young people aged 16-25 from across England, who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. Managed by St Basils and funded through The Department for Communities and Local Government; the group exists to assist National and Local Government, Local Authorities and organisations to develop and improve their services and involvement opportunities for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Greater public awareness of homelessness and young homeless people's options

We recommend that:

- Homelessness organisations and councils carry out early intervention work in schools, informing young people, under the age of 16, of the realities of becoming homeless;
- Families, including parents with young children, and the general public, are made more aware of homelessness and the options available for homeless people; and
- Staff and young people are made more aware of the housing options available to them, and both are adequately trained on the processes of attaining accommodation.

b) Prevention to ensure the cycle of homelessness does not reoccur

We recommend that:

- More mediation services are available for young people and their families; and
- More safe social activities are available to occupy young people and reduce stress on families. Some examples are community centres or youth camps.
- Greater awareness of options to avoid crisis point, for example, staying with friends, or 'time out' places, where available

c) Opportunities that meet young people's needs for education, training and employment

We recommend that:

- Young people receive help to fund their studies and training;
- Councils do more to find and create suitable work, or work related training, for young people;
- Young people have more of a say in the type of work or training that they take part in.

d) Support services more tailored, designed and evaluated by or with young people

We recommend that:

- Support services are less generic and are more tailored for each young person's individual needs;
- Homelessness organisations consult with young people when designing and implementing support services;
- The quality of support provided to young people by services is accurately evaluated, and ensure substandard services are improved.

e) Wider range of housing options to ensure suitability

We recommend that:

- More emergency accommodation and move-on accommodation are made available for young homeless people, where the criteria for attaining move-on accommodation account for the entire time that a young person spends in supported accommodation, not only their most recent stay, and should further prioritise young people in work;
- Young people with similar support needs are housed together to ensure young people's safety;
- Innovative solutions are explored to make more housing available for young people, such as housing co-operatives, where residents collectively manage their accommodation.

f) Increased support to guide young people through the welfare reform
We recommend that:

- Both local and central governments ensure that young people do not experience additional hardship as a result of the welfare reforms, and they are not penalised for taking steps to improve their situation, such as enrolling in some forms in education;
- Young people's support workers are allowed to further assist young people when working with the Job Centre Plus; and
- Housing Benefit conditions are changed so young people can afford to work while living in a hostel.

3. The National Youth Reference Group's – Young People's Top Three Priorities:

1. Prevention to ensure the cycle of homelessness does not reoccur

- More mediation services are available for young people and their families; and
- More safe social activities are available to occupy young people and reduce stress on families. Some examples are community centres or youth camps.
- Greater awareness of options to avoid crisis point, for example, staying with friends, or 'time out' places, where available

2. Opportunities that meet young people's needs for education, training and employment

- Young people receive help to fund their studies and training;
- Councils do more to find and create suitable work, or work related training, for young people;
- Young people have more of a say in the type of work or training that they take part in.

3. Support services more tailored, designed and evaluated by or with young people

- Support services are less generic and are more tailored for each young person's individual needs;
- Homelessness organisations consult with young people when designing and implementing support services;
- The quality of support provided to young people by services is accurately evaluated, and ensure substandard services are improved.

St Basils Young People's Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

St Basils works with young people aged 16 to 25 to enable them to find and keep a home, to develop their confidence, skills and opportunities, and to prevent youth homelessness. Through good quality accommodation, prevention and support, we meet the needs of young people, and raise their aspirations, whilst fully involving them in reviewing and developing services.

To develop this manifesto, we brought together a group of young people, from across the service, and discussed with them what they feel the key issues facing young homeless people today are, and what needs to be done to remedy these.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Provide more support to get young people into independent tenancies

We recommend that:

- More private rented deposit schemes to allow young people to gain private rented tenancies
- Stricter regulations are enforced on private landlords, to ensure acceptable standards of living are available for a variety of budgets
- Local authorities work in partnership with private landlords to raise awareness of youth homelessness, and reduce barriers for young people

b) Once we have achieved independent living, help us to maintain it

We recommend that:

- Investment continues in floating support for young people moving on from supported accommodation, as this is often the time when young people feel most vulnerable
- More local resources are available for young people living independently, such as food banks or furniture projects
- Assistance is easily accessible for young people, if and when needed, for general tenancy or household issues, for example, via a walk-in service and free helpline

c) Encouragement to improve skills and gain employment

We recommend that:

- Support is made available for people aged 18+ to remain in education
- Young people can earn a LIVING wage whilst claiming housing benefit – people should be better off for gaining employment
- Benefits and education services work in partnership more to allow young people to learn and gain skills, without jeopardising their income

d) Investment in accommodation, to ensure availability and suitability

We recommend that:

- More supported housing, for a variety of needs, is provided for young people
- Young people are housed with people of similar needs to ensure their level of independence is not inhibited
- Supported accommodation should be financially viable for young people in employment

e) Raise our awareness of homelessness, and offer us options to prevent homelessness

We recommend that:

- 'Time out' spaces are more readily available, to allow young people to reach resolutions and return to their home environment, where safe and appropriate
- REAL life skills are taught through the school curriculum to prepare young people for independent living whilst still in a stable and safe environment
- Homelessness awareness is highlighted through schools and colleges, to ensure young people know where they can access support when they need it

f) Further integrated services and effective partnership work
We recommend that:

- Communication between services is less disjointed, to improve continuity, consistency and efficiency
- Health and homelessness services work in partnership to support young people's mental, physical and emotional wellbeing
- Partnership work between agencies is developed to ensure effective signposting

3. St Basils – Young People's Top Three Priorities:

From the above recommendations, the following 3 are St Basils Top 3 Priorities:-

1. Provide more support to get young people into independent tenancies
 - More private rented deposit schemes to allow young people to gain private rented tenancies
 - Stricter regulations are enforced on private landlords, to ensure acceptable standards of living are available for a variety of budgets
 - Local authorities work in partnership with private landlords to raise awareness of youth homelessness, and reduce barriers for young people
2. Encouragement to improve skills and gain employment
 - Support is made available for people aged 18+ to remain in education
 - Young people can earn a LIVING wage whilst claiming housing benefit – people should be better off for gaining employment
 - Benefits and education services work in partnership more to allow young people to learn and gain skills, without jeopardising their income
3. Raise our awareness of homelessness, and offer us options to prevent homelessness
 - 'Time out' spaces are more readily available, to allow young people to reach resolutions and return to their home environment, where safe and appropriate
 - REAL life skills are taught through the school curriculum to prepare young people for independent living whilst still in a stable and safe environment
 - Homelessness awareness is highlighted through schools and colleges, to ensure young people know where they can access support when they need it



St Mungo's Young People's Manifesto

1. Background Organisation Information

St Mungo's has been opening doors for homeless people since 1969. We currently run over 100 projects, providing accommodation for more than 1700 people every night and helping thousands more who are rough sleeping or at risk of homelessness. St Mungo's delivers a range of residential services from emergency shelters to semi-independent flats, as well as non-residential health, education and employment services. We also prevent homelessness through our housing advice programmes. We have specific young people's projects in Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes and London.

2. Young People's Key Recommendations

a) Information for Young People when (and before) they become homeless is really important

Presented by Young Person's Name, from Geographical Area.

We recommend that:

- Information is given to young people in schools and colleges so that they know how to access help should they become homeless or be at risk of homelessness
- There should be easy to access, clear and practical advice on what to do and where to go when you become homeless on council websites
- Homelessness is not just about housing – young people need timely access to emotional support when they become homeless to help them manage a difficult situation

b) There needs to be access to a range of options for young people moving from supported accommodation

Presented by Young Person's Name, from Geographical Area.

We recommend that:

- Councils must provide clear information to young people about what options are available for them when they move-on. It should be easy to access, for example be accessible on the internet via Council websites.
- There should be a range of options for young people depending on their needs including affordable housing eg. flats, shared houses, bedsits
- There should be support available for young people after they move-on such as drop in services or phone support to give young people confidence to deal with any issues managing this transition

c) Young homeless people need support to prepare for move-on

Presented by Young Person's Name, from Geographical Area.

We recommend that:

- There should be workshops on lifeskills such as cooking, budgeting, paying rent what it's like to live independently – these should be provided in schools as well as in homelessness organisations
- There should be funding available for young people to access money to support them with buying essentials such as furniture when they move on – the new systems do not sufficiently replace the old Community Care Grants and some people do not have family or care leaver grants to fall back on. Furniture recycling and places to access cheap furniture should be available nationwide.

d) Young people want to take part in education, training and employment but face challenges in achieving their goals, they should receive support to address these challenges presented by Young Person's Name, from geographical area.

We recommend that:

- The Job Centre should be supportive of young people looking for work and help them to find something which they want to do which will help sustain employment. Education should be supported as part of planning for future and employment, it should not just be about entering work immediately.
- Lack of experience can be a barrier to young people entering employment - there should be more options for apprenticeships and education or training with work placements to support people into employment with experience of working. Companies should provide work experience opportunities for young people to 'try out' jobs which could work for both employers and young people

- Travel should be affordable for young people to help them sustain education, training and employment – travel could be subsidised to help young people achieve their goals.
- e) Young people need to have somewhere safe to live which suit their needs and takes into account safeguarding of young people presented by Young Person's Name, from Geographical Area.
We recommend that:
- There are a range of accommodation options including accommodation for under 18s who may be particularly vulnerable – particularly after concerns highlighted in Bullfinch case in Oxfordshire where young people were 'groomed'
 - There should be training and information for young people about how to keep themselves safe

3. St Mungo's – Young People's Top Three Priorities:

1. Presented by Young Person's Name, from Geographical Area
2. Young people should have somewhere safe to live
 - Take on learning from the Bullfinch case to ensure young people are safe and know how to protect themselves and where to go for advice
 - Accommodation continues to be provided for young people to meet their needs with consideration about placing people of similar ages together
3. Young people should be supported back into education, training and employment
 - Practical support should be given to young people to ensure they can access and sustain work eg. action around travel fares, information, advice and guidance
 - Opportunities to gain work experience are crucial for young people completing education to enter the workforce
 - Reacquiring homelessness problems in the future

YMCA Young People's Manifesto

YMCA England brought together 13 young people from across England to represent their own views and the views of young people staying at YMCAs about the issues of youth homelessness.

The day was broken down into two sections; the first discussed their personal backgrounds and the causes of homelessness amongst young people, and the second focussed on what the young people believed the Government should be doing to address the issue. Questions were used to stimulate discussion and a summary of those responses is provided alongside the three main priorities the young people believed the Government should be focusing on.

This session looked at the reasons the young people became homeless, what the causes for this were and if there was anything which could have been done to prevent it. There was a variety of different reasons why the participants became homeless with the majority suggesting the root cause was family breakdown.

Main reasons for young people becoming homeless:

- Relationship/family breakdown
- Unemployment or changes in employment circumstances
- Drugs, alcohol or mental health problems
- Unable to meet high rent costs

Is there anything which could prevent this from happening?

- Increased opportunities for young people including apprenticeships, training, work experience and access to education
- In some cases family mediation and early intervention services
- Learning appropriate life skills; budgeting, cooking, dealing with independence

Government and Society

This session focussed on what the Government and wider society could do to help homeless young people both before they become homeless and during their homelessness. Raising awareness of youth homelessness was discussed with the focus being around the media and society's views which were largely seen as negative. Assistance with finding the move from supported housing into their own accommodation was seen as a major barrier to progression, as the complications which arise from starting work and housing benefit being stopped mean that housing rents can become unsustainable.

Young People's Key Recommendations

Young people face many issues when dealing with complex relationship and need as much assistance as possible to help them through these periods

We recommend that:

- Young people are given opportunities to receive mentoring from people who have previously experienced relationship breakdowns
- Access is made available to a mental health worker to answer questions and talk confidentially about any concerns young people may have
- There is an increase in the number of school programmes and after school activities

Young people need support to avoid and overcome a lack of motivation, mental health issues, and drugs and alcohol problems

We recommend that:

- Inspirational speakers who have experience similar issues should be brought into school and youth clubs to speak to young people
- Myth busting on topics such as drugs and alcohol which explain the actual impacts they can have on young people are delivered

- More information and lectures should be given in school on these areas to improve young people's awareness

Experiencing the realities of being independent

We recommend that:

- Life skills courses should be introduced in schools which equip young people with personal finance, healthy living and managing relationships skills
- Opportunities to see the realities of being a homeless young person such as meeting young homeless people and workshops in schools delivered by homelessness organisations should be introduced
- Young people should be encouraged to be more independent within the home environment to experience what it is like to live independently

Supporting young people to find employment

We recommend that:

- Jobcentres in partnership with local businesses offer secure jobs for young people
- A banding system for people who sign on should be introduced; where those who show they are making more of an effort to find employment are given increased levels of support
- A tailored approach to supporting young people is adopted by the Jobcentre which is flexible to the individuals circumstances

Opportunities for young people

We recommend that:

- There should be an increase in the availability of alternative pathways to employment rather than traditional educational routes for those aged 16-24, such as apprenticeships, training, internships and work experience
- Afterschool activities and youth centres should be increased so that young people can experience different environments and have access to non-formal education
- There should be no age or lower the age range of opportunities to improve young people's skills which currently seems too high and which there is a lack of available funding for.

Housing issues; affordability, rogue landlords, access and security

We recommend that:

- Private landlords need to meet a certain standard level and be more carefully regulated to ensure accommodation is fit for use
- References more readily available for tenants who are on benefits. These could come from the council/jobcentre/support workers
- Renting costs need to be reduced in order for them to become more affordable for young people

Three Priorities for Government

During the final session the young people were asked to prioritise the three areas that government should be working on to help reduce youth homelessness and to combat the issues surrounding it.

The following recommendations were made:

Prevention through Education

We recommend that:

- Inspirational speakers who have experienced similar issues should be brought in to speak to young people about the realities of certain situations such as drug and alcohol abuse or what it's like to live independently
- Life skills courses should be introduced in schools which equip young people with personal finance, healthy living and managing relationships skills
- Access to a mental health worker to answer questions and talk confidentially about any concerns they may have

Housing Issues; affordability, rogue landlords, access and security

We recommend that:

- Private landlords need to meet a certain standard level and be more carefully regulated to ensure accommodation is fit for use
- References being more readily available for tenants who are on benefits. This could come from the council/jobcentre/support workers
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Reflections of the Day: Young people

What Youth Homeless Parliament members and Partners said about their day in the House of Commons
16th December 2013.

DePaul Uk

"I enjoyed going to the Houses of Parliament because we got to give our opinions about how hard life is when you become homeless etc. I was so nervous at first because I wanted to get my opinions out but I was scared! But in the end I stood up in front of loads of people and told them what I thought! By doing this it made me feel good about myself! It also made me realise some people do listen to what you have to say. I was really pleased because everyone just sat and listened to what I said. I never thought I would have the confidence to speak in front of loads of people but I thought wrong!

I also enjoyed looking around London! Because this was my first time of going to London! Also it felt good to be out of Rochdale for a bit. If it wasn't for Susie and Charlotte (support workers) I wouldn't of gone to London. I had an amazing time with Charlotte and Suzie. I felt safe and secure around them. And if it wasn't for Suzie and Charlotte I would have been lost! I would also like to say a very big thank you for the person that let me have the opportunity to go to London and Parliament! I feel so much better now I've got my words out of how hard life is!"

"I loved this trip. The sights were extraordinary. I loved every single minute of it. The people I went with were so nice and they had all gone through similar experiences."

"It didn't seem real that I was sat in Parliament, but it was an amazing experience."

National Youth Reference Group

"The Youth Homeless Parliament event was a lovely experience. It felt so good to be a part of it, representing National Youth Reference Group, and speaking to MPs. To me, it made everyone put aside day-to-day politics, and party rivalry, and showed how MPs do care, and have some understanding of the background of youth homelessness. Also, the MPs staying to have further discussion, for longer than they had planned, was so positive. Both young people and MPs showed their appreciation for the chance to have these discussions, as it is usually so rare for young people and government to work together. I found this event truly eye-opening and feel privileged to have had this opportunity."

"I found the Youth Homeless Parliament to be an overall productive day. To have the organisations that participated, is great, and it was good to see young people representing youth homelessness nationally. I also think it was brilliant that MPs continued to commit to the Youth Homeless Parliament after the party reshuffle. I do feel though that the collaborative work amongst young people at the previous Youth Homeless Parliament was something that this year's event would have benefitted from, rather than each organisation working individually."

St Basils

"When I was told that I would be speaking at the Youth Homeless Parliament, I was so excited and grateful for the opportunity. When we got to Parliament, it was great to see all the young people there. As it got closer to my turn to speak, I felt really nervous, but once I had spoken I felt proud of myself. When we were asking questions, the MPs answered most of them, and some of the feedback was great. I really enjoyed the day and feel so happy to have been involved. Being a part of the Youth Homeless Parliament has made me feel like I've truly done something."

Crisis Skylight

"We all went into the House of Commons where we were introduced to Kris Hopkins (Minister of Housing) and Stephen Williams (Department for Communities and Local Government). I raised two points for Crisis which were 1. The national minimum wage disproportionately affects young people who are living independently and 2. The shared accommodation rate for under 35's and cuts to all benefits for under 25's will cause other young people to become in danger of homelessness... This was a nerve racking position to be in as I have never done anything like this before. We got a positive response and the ministers said two vital points were made. I thought it was worth while because our voice was heard, especially because the ministers postponed their interview for 20 minutes to keep hearing us out. We was put into groups as part of a workshop and was given a scenario and we was to think of the pro's and con's of that situation, this was to give the ministers a live example of how homelessness and benefits effect us. This was a good opportunity to explore the issues from a live perspective."

Foyer Federation

"The whole visit to the Houses of Parliament for me was not only an honour to represent SHYPP and the Foyer Federation but personally as what I achieved in one day was amazing and a mile stone for building my confidence. When we arrived at Westminster all parliament staff and security were welcoming and friendly. We met with Hollie from the Foyer Federation where we went through what was about to happen and asked if any of us wanted to stand and be the speaker for the Foyer Federation's and tell MP's our top three priorities and our recommendations for the priorities. I was one of three young people to put my name forward and subsequently my name was chosen out of a hat at random to stand in front of the 100 young people and the MP's.

Once we had organised our selves we made our way to the parliament committee room where we would be part of 100 young people from various homelessness charities. The lady chair briefed us all on the agenda before the two MP's arrived whom listened to what we all had to say and to answer all of our points and questions put to them in the limited time they allocated to our meeting. Both MP's did request a few minutes extension as they had other engagements, however they stayed with us a further 20 past the extended time frame.

After the MP's left the meeting we all split into five groups to answer some questions regarding types of housing and what should be provided and built with the tight finances the government has. All our responses were taken down in note form and on flip chart paper which was taken by the teams that deal with housing in government. Overall the day was fantastic and feel very privileged to of had the opportunity to go to the Houses of Parliament to talk to MP's about homelessness and how it affects young people in so many different ways. The day also was a very big help for me personally because if you were to ask me 6 months ago to stand in front of 100 other young people and members of parliament then I would not of put myself forward for speaking so now I feel just that bit more confident for the next time I have to speak in front of a large number of people."

Reflections of the Day - Professionals

Jacqui Mclusky

Director of Policy & Communication, Homelesslink

For the second year running, 100 young people who are, or had been, homeless, met in Parliament to meet with Ministers to share their views of what needs to change to end youth homelessness. They impressed with their passion and commitment to see change happen. And they articulately set out what they think are the main problems that need fixing but also gave their views on the solutions.

There was much agreement across the young people about their key priorities for change:

- Having a place to call their home and the need to increase the supply of affordable, secure and quality housing
- Better prevention to ensure the cycle of homelessness does not reoccur including education, mediation and short term crisis services that provide a breathing space and time out.
- Support into education, training & employment
- Effective welfare safety net and do NOT remove Housing Benefit to under 25 year olds
- Protect funding and provision of support services for young people
- Challenge and change the negative perceptions and the deficit view of young homeless people as a problem and to involve them in the solution.

Kris Hopkins and Stephen Williams, Ministers from the Department of Communities and Local Government were the two Parliamentarians the young people spoke to. Homeless Link supports the Youth Homelessness Parliament and it is an influential vehicle in having the voices of young homeless people heard directly by key decision makers including Ministers, MPs and Peers. However, one plea I would make in the thinking of next year's event would be to involve a wider range of political parties, including the shadow Housing Minister and invite other MPs or Ministers, for example Nick Hurd MP, Minister for Civil Society in the Cabinet Office, who has responsibility for young people in Government and also to include Peers. In this way a wider range of Parliamentarians can hear directly from the young people and, like those of us who were there, be truly inspired and better understand the change that needs to happen if we want to make any progress in ending youth homelessness.

Callan Biggs

NYRG Trainee, St Basils

"It is rare that individuals that use services, get the opportunity to influence them. The Youth Homeless Parliament has shown that this can happen, and has proven it to be a great success. Having experienced homelessness myself, and participated in the Youth Homeless Parliament last year, as a young person, I feel it is so positive to have the country's leading youth homelessness organisations coming together again to work towards a common goal – ensuring young people have their voices heard. To see youth homelessness being represented nationally, through both the Manifestos, and the discussion that followed, was truly inspiring, and I hope that this innovative partnership between young people, professionals and government, can continue into the future."

Ellie Jones

Communication Officer, St Basils

"I'm St Basils Communications Officer and the official photographer and tweeter on the @YHPParliament account. I travelled down by coach with young people from St Basils. St Basils, with the help of 8 partners, facilitated the co-ordination and organisation of this event and as I watched my colleague ring various young people from the National Youth Reference Group which St Basils also co-ordinates, I had a real sense of young people from across the nation, navigating a proliferation of different transport networks to get down to London for this meeting. Filing past the iconic Big Ben and into Parliament, there was a definite sense of nervous excitement from the young people and I think the location helped with that; there was a grand sense of occasion and rightly so; these young people made history – the first official 'Youth Homeless Parliament' with government ministers answering young people's questions and responding directly to their concerns.

With Twitter and other forms of instant communication and interaction the stage was even bigger, with young people, DCLG and representatives from organisations in the room also tweeting and other social commentators adding their thoughts to the discussion taking place simultaneously online.

An on-going concern for homeless young people is how they are perceived and represented. These young people certainly did loads to expel those stereotypes that are so damaging to young people. They confidently expressed their concerns in a balanced and well-judged fashion. Kris Hopkins MP himself commented that he was impressed with the standard of contributions.

I spoke with some of the young people on the day and I think for them joining other people their age who know implicitly what they've been through helped them; 100 voices echoing each other adds weight to those experiences, those concerns and suggestions."





Making a stand against youth homelessness

In partnership with:



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