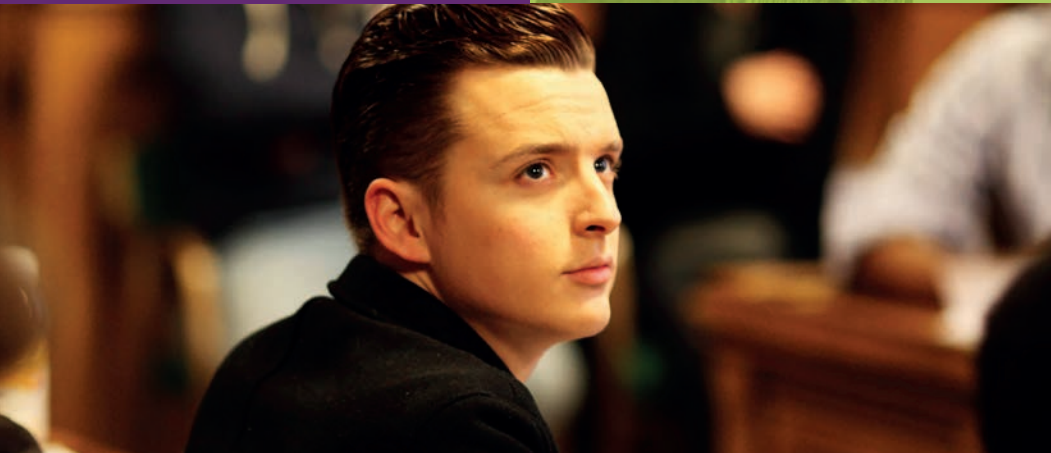


2014



YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT



MAKING A STAND AGAINST YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

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CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP) met on the 9th December 2014 in Westminster. This was the second formal meeting of the Parliament and this year, 100 young people from the 9 agencies had worked on developing a consolidated Manifesto.

Our learning last year was that we needed to create as much time as possible for young people to share their lived experiences with Ministers so the priorities in the manifesto could be contextualised.

The Parliament was opened by a young person, 8 young people shared their experiences of homelessness and 11 young people presented the key manifesto points included in this report. Many more were keen to ask questions and make points. Sadly there was insufficient time with Ministers to answer all the questions or expand the debate.

Ministers have confirmed that they were moved by the young people's personal stories and impressed by their courage and found the young people's support for each other and their drive to help others, inspiring.

Young people continue to ask the key question; what changes as a result of their contributions? A general election is imminent and young people are keen that their priorities and proposals are listened to and considered within Party Manifestos. The need for youth engagement in the democratic process is critical. Young people who contribute to Youth Homeless Parliament have engaged, they have shared their experience and offered their advice about how to make things better, so that homelessness is no longer part of growing up for too many. It is time that there is a clear answer to their question.

It was a privilege to chair the event and I would like to thank the YHP Members for their contributions and consideration. I would like to thank Ministers for their welcome and for listening and responding to the Members and for undertaking to take the manifesto away and consider it within the context of their own proposals. 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. Next year, I would like to ask for more time and continuing engagement during the year.



Jean Templeton
Chief Executive
St Basils

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

St Basils, a youth homeless 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) for 7 years, made up of over 45 young people from across England who are or have been homeless.

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, when 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 have been homeless and currently receiving support from one of the following charities that work with homeless young people: St Basils, Centrepont, 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, Centrepont, Homeless Link, Crisis, Foyer Federation, YMCA and St Mungo's Broadway 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 a range of housing related matters.

In 2014, the Youth Homeless Parliament attended the House of Commons, Westminster, again. This time, they presented one single consolidated Manifesto from the collective youth membership.

THE MANIFESTO

The Youth Homeless Parliament meeting took place on 9th December 2014 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) and Rob Wilson (Conservative) Minister for Civil Society, to express their concerns and share their ideas about how to tackle the issues surrounding

homelessness.

Youth Homeless Parliament members from organisations including, St Basils, Forum Housing, Centrepont, Foyer Federation, St Mungos Broadway, YMCA England, DePaul UK, Crisis and NYRG, attended to deliver their collaborated manifesto. Youth members presented their top priorities from their manifesto to each other and to Ministers.

In preparation for the main event, young people took part in workshops around the country to debate the issues and identify their priorities.

The partner organisations revisited their previous year's manifestos with young people. Young people were asked to take into account the changing context and what their priorities would be for a new government.

Each organisations priorities and solutions were consolidated into one Youth Homeless Parliament manifesto which was made up of 10 key points, which included giving young people a voice, employment, training and education, prevention, benefits, support, housing, health and the criminal justice system.





YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT:

A young man with short blonde hair, glasses, and a grey sweater is speaking at a podium. He is holding a piece of paper and gesturing with his hands. In the background, several other young people are seated at desks, listening. The setting appears to be a formal hall or parliament chamber with wooden paneling and large windows.

**AIRS
MEADOWS**

WELCOME SPEECH 2014

“Welcome to the Youth Homeless Parliament 2014. In front of you today is a collective of Young People who are currently experiencing or have experienced homelessness, all of us here are represented by an organisation, and soon you will hear some personal testimonials from someone from each of their corresponding charities.

I would like to thank all of the Young People who have come across the United Kingdom to be here at this momentous connection with Her Majesties Government, but also, and most rightly so, the Ministers who have granted us their time. Now, I would also like to express my sole gratitude at the opportunity given to us today by Kris Hopkins MP, Stephen Williams MP and Rob Wilson MP.

As mentioned before, one of the most important aspects of today is showing that Youth Homelessness is a progressively detrimental issue that is facing a growing number of young people. In front of you are Homeless Experts; the term “experts” as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary means: a person who is very knowledgeable about or skillful in a particular area. And we, in front of you all share one thing in common – we have the knowledge of what it means to be

homeless.

I recently read a quote, by Rick Warren, about how precious time is, which to me proves what a beautiful moment this is, being able to share our personal experiences with members of Parliament. “Time is your most precious gift because you only have a set amount of it. You can make more money, but you can’t make more time. When you give someone your time, you are giving them a portion of your life that you’ll never get back.”

What we want to do is to use our time to strengthen ties between homeless young people and Government and use our joint expertise to bring Employment, Education, Training and most importantly Housing to the people who need it the most.

I hope that this Union truly shows a collective voice, and lets us tackle the issues together as one.

Thank you for your time, but more importantly, thank you for being willing to show that this government is ready to advance on an issue that is affecting the future of the electorate.

I would now like to pass the opportunity over to a select few who are willing to share their testimony on the issues they have faced.

”



MARIAM AHMED

“

Was I always going to be here? No I was not, truth is you never know what is going to happen. We live in a society where no one is asking about what is happening to the homeless, it seems no one cares because it is easier to go about our daily lives without thinking about it, although we could say we live 2 minutes from homelessness; with 7 out of 10 of us potentially being 1 paycheck away from becoming homeless. We have come dangerously close to

accepting the homeless situation as a problem we cannot solve, but together, us 100 young people who have in some way, shape or form experienced homelessness have come up with our manifesto of key points which we feel can help us begin to tackle and eradicate this issue of youth homelessness that we have been battling for over 30 years. We can only begin to fight against this poverty at home and together as one, young people and professionals together, so I present to you our Youth Homeless Parliament manifesto.

”

YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT MANIFESTO 2014

Give Young People A Voice

1. Opportunities within services need to be provided for young people to engage in meaningful activities and involvement, to build confidence skills and abilities, in order to prevent the cycle of homelessness.
2. Young People should be involved in designing, tailoring and evaluating services.
3. Encourage and utilise young people's feedback on services.

Employment

1. More help is needed with travel for 16-25 year olds, not just under 18's, to attend opportunities for work and preparation for work.
2. Job centre staff need more training on how to help young people.
3. Councils should do more to find and create suitable work, or work related training for young people.

Training

1. More on the job training is required (not just apprenticeships).
2. Government should fund training opportunities for those aged 18+.
3. Amend regulations which prevent young people from participating on courses for over 16 hours per week whilst claiming JSA or Universal Credit.
4. Young people should have more opportunities, choice and a range of options from work experience to apprenticeships to help gain experience.

Education

1. Young people want to take part in education and training, but face challenges. Barriers need to be removed for young people to be able to achieve this.
2. Teachers should not give up so easily on young people.
3. Prevention can be achieved through education. Life skills should be introduced in schools.

Prevention and Early Intervention

1. Help young people to develop the skills they need to live independently, including in private tenancies.
2. Information for young people when and before they become homeless is really important; information in schools, colleges and on Council websites should be easy to access, clear and provide practical advice on what to do and where to go.
3. Needs to be investment into families, looking at more informal ways to help and improve communication in families, not just mediation once in crisis. Respite is often required – support for families and help young people to return home (if safe).

Benefits For Young People

1. There should be no age differences for JSA. 16-21 year olds should receive the same amount as older claimants.
2. No cuts to Housing Benefit for 18-21s.
3. Homeless young people should not be at risk of benefit sanctions whilst trying to get back on their feet.
4. Housing Benefit and JSA should be based on individual need, not a one size fits all approach.

Support

1. Need a tailored approach to supporting young people which is flexible to the individual's circumstances.
2. Support services in accommodation should also be available after young people have moved and should have flexible hours, not just 9 to 5.
3. Don't stop funding support in accommodation.

Housing

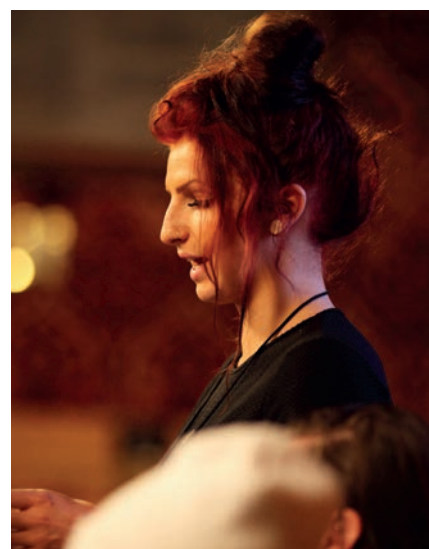
1. Young people should be priority for empty homes. Young people have said that there are many "empty" homes in England and these should be priority for young people.
2. Young people moving into the Private Rented Sector from supported accommodation should be assisted through a gradual tail off from the benefits system.
3. Housing Options for young people should be based on individual needs of young people and accommodation should be safe and affordable.
4. Each area should have its own emergency accommodation which is safe, has food, support and counselling and facilities such as computers.

Health

1. The same level of priority should be given for mental health issues as physical health, waiting times for access to mental health services should be significantly reduced.
2. Young people need more activities to participate in to support positive mental wellbeing.
3. It is hard to eat healthily on a budget, young people should be given vouchers for healthy food
4. GPs should not prescribe unnecessary drugs. When a young person has issues with mental health such as depression, anxiety and stress Doctors are too quick to prescribe medication rather than seek alternatives.

Criminal Justice

1. Young people who pose no immediate threat should not be denied a job just because they have a criminal record.
2. Young people in prison should be able to search for jobs before they are released
3. It should be made easier for young people with a criminal record to access training and employment so they can move on successfully.



REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY

YOUNG PEOPLE



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I thought it was a really fun day and was great to be able to talk about our experiences of being homeless. It is not often you get to speak to politicians and especially the ones who can do something about our issues but hopefully they heard what we all had to say and will do something about it. If we would have had time to ask more questions or a chance to talk in groups with the different MPs that would have improved the event but on the whole we loved it.

Sabrina Crawford

Youth Homeless Parliament Member
YMCA ENGLAND

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“

Me personally? The Youth Homeless Parliament is not just an event, it's a place where people unite together. Being part of something big like this, it's a great pleasure. One day I will be looking back and seeing young people at my age who don't have to go through the same problems because we were the ones who influenced the change. The Youth Homeless Parliament is something that is moving fast to make the necessary changes, don't underestimate it just because we come from a homeless background.

The Event to the Houses of Parliament was a day where I came out of my comfort zone. It wasn't just an ordinary day but a day when the MPs put aside their politics and showed strong empathy towards the speeches which were given out concerning our backgrounds and what we need to prosper. Giving a speech to the MPs and other 100s of people was something that I didn't think of achieving but through the courage of my team members and staff I achieved what has to be done. This experience has been stored in my confidence book for later use.

It was a cold day but with the Youth Homeless Parliament members and members of staff we made it the day of the year. Meeting my like-minded friends eager to have our voices heard was definitely something that I would do all over again. I think the YHP is a brilliant team, we came for the same reasons and we will continue to grow. TOGETHER EVERYONE ACHIEVES MORE (T-E-A-M)

Abu Issa

Youth Homeless Parliament Member
FOYER FEDERATION

”

“

Arriving at the historically beautiful Houses of Parliament, everyone was getting a bit nervous. Sitting as part of the one hundred faces for youth homelessness I could not have felt more proud of myself and all of us. When it all began and I came to say my part my hands were shaking and I was trying not to cry and remembering to breathe, although everyone's response was very comforting. I believe the outcome was of a positive notion as the MPs seemed shocked at what we had said; implying that we had supplied them with new information which might spark some differences to be made. In reflection, I could not have asked for a better outcome and the day as a whole was very self-rewarding for everyone who was present.

Emily Trowell

Youth Homeless Parliament Member
ST MUNGO'S BROADWAY

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“

Speaking in Parliament was the most incredible thing I have ever done. Such a passion for change echoed throughout the halls of Parliament that day. I was so glad to be there, it was Awesome.

Airs Medows

Youth Homeless Parliament Member
NATIONAL YOUTH REFERENCE GROUP

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REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY

PROFESSIONALS





YMCA felt the event was a success in regards to bringing homeless young people together to talk about their issues and experiences. However it was disappointing for them to only be able to have a small portion of this time with Government Ministers. Each individual story is different and for young people to truthfully get their opinions heard the event would need to be longer and to have ministerial presence throughout. The logistics for the event were well thought out and the work in the lead up to the day was excellently brought together by St Basils.

Liam Preston

Senior Parliamentary and Policy Officer
YMCA ENGLAND



I thought the event was good and I know that our young people got a lot out of being there. I was pleased that 3 Ministers took the time to attend. Whilst obviously I understand the time pressures on Ministers' diaries, I think it would have been great if they had been able to spend more time answering questions directly from the young people as I think this was the most valuable part of the experience for the young people involved.

Sarah Macfadyen

Policy and Parliamentary Officer
CRISIS



“

Attending Youth Parliament as a member of staff was fantastic as I was offered the chance to get involved with engaging young people at DePaul into a unique opportunity. I found listening to the young person's personal experiences emotional yet uplifting. It was inspirational to witness many young people stand up, speak publicly and in many cases overcome their nerves and fears. I was impressed with how engaged many of the young people were politically and how passionately they challenged the MPs. I think that engaging young people in similar events and offering opportunities on a regular basis would help break down the view that the event offers an opportunity for the MPs to pay lip service to the young people without any real substance behind it. This was what some of the young people fed back to me. One young person stated that they felt so privileged to be in that building and to be given the opportunity to speak about their experience which sums up for me that the day was definitely an experience that left a positive impact on all that attended.

Jessica Adams

Meaningful Activities Coordinator
DEPAUL UK

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This is the second year I have been involved with the YHP, and both years I have been impressed with the ideas and passion the young people have about issues affecting them and other young homeless people. The young people who attended parliament had great ideas about how things could be better for them in terms of housing, education, employment and health, and how the government could support them and others like them to escape homelessness and achieve their aspirations.

On the day itself the young people we took to parliament were up early and enthusiastic about the day. Listening to all of the young people's stories was at times difficult, hearing about the struggles they had been through. But, it was also uplifting, seeing their hopes for the future - homes, careers and lives. There were lots of ideas about how to improve things - more flexible benefit systems, keeping housing benefit for 18-21 year olds, wider training and work placement opportunities and more. The young people taking part in the YHP were ambitious and wanted the same things we all do - somewhere safe and stable to live, a decent job, and opportunities to live good lives.

Seeing the passion in their questions and presentations on the day I am hopeful that there will be changes made to help YP who are homeless now, and to prevent YP becoming homeless in the future.

Helen Denyer

Area Manager - Bucks, Herts and Oxon
ST MUNGOS BROADWAY





ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR MINISTERS*

1 You state you see us as the experts in this issue of (youth) homelessness, but we only meet once a year at this 'Youth Homeless Parliament,' which is an incredible opportunity but can be tokenistic. When is this going to change so we as the 'experts' on youth homelessness can have more of an impact?

2 When and how are we going to see a change within Parliament with people running it who actually represent us? Whether that be ethnicity wise, homeless, disabilities etc. Society is changing yet we are being run by a government who is further away than ever.

3 There is a massive difference in terms of support/ help with homeless situations in the North/South but also in different cities. Why don't we have a protocol in place that all local authorities have to run by?

4 Where do you think the responsibility for homelessness should fall – on charities or Government? If you agree its Government, you need to make sure frontline services are using the money you mention effectively. What's really helped me is the quality of the support St Basils has provided, tailored to what I needed to help me. I want to see the importance of this individual support being recognised by government, rather than just assuming the money has taken care of it.

5 Do you agree that because each council within the UK is run by different parties and as a result of that, a lot of young people are missing out on services that I might receive in my home town?

6 What can the Government do to make counselling more accessible?

7 What can be done to change some employers cruel attitudes and discrimination towards people who are/or have been homeless?

8 As a young person, we try to go to college to better our chances of a good career. However, to continue CVCS, claiming Income Support or JSA, we cannot attend a college course 15 hours or more per week. Are there any plans on this changing so we can both attend college and still claim benefits?



9 Are the government going to come up with another benefits system that suits young people but also develops them so they can give back?

10 Why do people that have alcohol and drug issues receive more money (benefits) than the homeless? You are only funding their issues and denying others help.

11 This is not a specific question, but I am currently on an apprenticeship scheme earning National Minimum wage. I have rent arrears to pay and housing benefit overpayments because I was working full time earning £10 per hour. Now I am earning National Minimum Wage on an apprenticeship I don't think I will ever move out of my hostel because when I will work earning decent money I will still not be able to afford to move out.

12 I am lucky and employed above average pay grade. When I was homeless, I was put into debt and have been put into a very vulnerable situation. I do not have the money to move out alone and I don't have anything to show for working full time. I also do not qualify for any kind of help. What help is available to people like me; should we just be forgotten?

13 As a Young Person, I would like to see mentoring becoming available within Parliament from MP's or Ministers in order to give young people the experience, confidence and knowledge (of the Parliamentary system). Also to be able to take young people's ideas more seriously and it will be a chance for young people to learn how to represent themselves in Parliament, rather than relying on the MP's to do so.

14 What I want to ask is, is there any help for young people that come from another country that want to continue with their studies (here) and get a better future?

* The above questions were unable to be answered due to time running out and were forwarded on behalf of the YHP members.





Y O U T H H O M E L E S S P A R L I A M E N T
F A C I L I T A T E D B Y



I N P A R T N E R S H I P W I T H



Contact Information

YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

St Basils
Heath Mill Lane
Deritend
Birmingham
B9 4AX

Tel: 0121 772 2483

info@stbasils.org.uk
www.stbasils.org.uk
www.youthhomelessparliament.co.uk

Charity No: 1080154
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