

YOUTH VOICE

SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

YOUTH HOMELESS
PARLIAMENT 2017

INTRODUCTION

The Youth Homeless Parliament was established in May 2013 to enable young homeless people to have a voice and to share their experiences with politicians in Westminster. The work was funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) following a successful initial event involving the St Basils National Youth Reference Group and Ministers in 2012.

The Youth Homeless Parliament, which is coordinated by St Basils but involving a wide range of agencies and young people across England, has continued to progress year on year; enabling dialogue directly between Ministers, civil servants and young people who have experienced homelessness, contributing to the development of good practice to support homeless young people across England.

In 2017, the Youth Homeless Parliament were asked by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to consult and offer key recommendations on the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Bill. Young people welcomed this opportunity to discuss priorities and develop recommendations for Departments across Government, which they believe could make a genuine difference.



YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT 2017

The Youth Homeless Parliament 2017 brought together 100 young people from across England, offering varied perspectives from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures and locations. These young people have experienced homelessness and are currently receiving support from one of the following charities:

- St Basils
- Centrepont
- Depaul UK
- The Foyer Federation
- St Mungo's
- YMCA England
- Roundabout
- Crisis
- National Youth Reference Group members: young people from across England who have been homeless and are trained and supported by St Basils to work with local authorities to improve services

BRIEF FROM MINISTERS

In November 2016, Marcus Jones MP asked the Youth Homeless Parliament to consider the Homelessness Reduction Bill, which was passing through Parliament and to develop a set of recommendations for implementing prevention and relief services for young people, should the Bill become law.

The Youth Homeless Parliament were asked to focus on ideas for improving local service delivery. This included the development of multi-agency approaches, in order to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place as well as how to better support successful moves to independence for vulnerable young people.

The Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education also asked for views on how to better support young vulnerable people in terms of:

1. What type of early intervention would prevent young people from offending or re-offending?
2. What support do care leavers need to maintain tenancies and live independently within the community?

CONSULTATION PROCESS

Although St Basils leads the work of the Youth Homeless Parliament, other partner organisations also contribute to the consultative process which ensures that there is a national voice, delivering on a variety of experiences and perspectives from across the country. In response to the request from the Minister and the Ministerial Working Group the process was as follows:

- Members of the Youth Homeless Parliament were involved in discussing the Homelessness Reduction Bill and the questions raised by the Minister within their own services
- The National Youth Reference Group (NYRG) held an event and drafted recommendations for dissemination to partners
- Three members of the NYRG then met with officials at the Ministerial Working Group in March 2017 to report on progress and provide an overview of issues discussed during the consultation process



RECOMMENDATIONS MADE FOR IMPROVING LOCAL PREVENTION AND RELIEF OF HOMELESSNESS SERVICES

There are **four key themes** identified by young people from across England.

1. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The issue

Young people felt that when crisis struck they didn't know enough about where to go and what to do to get help and that people around them didn't know enough either about the risks of homelessness. Some young people also felt unprepared for living independently and found it difficult to move on successfully. The education system is one of the best ways to connect with young people and should be better used to engage with vulnerable young people from an early stage to help prevent homelessness.

Key Recommendations

Life Skill Programmes

Key life skills are an essential part of being able to live independently. Examples of this would be budgeting and paying bills, appropriate relationships and understanding mental and physical health. Life skills programmes should be included in the education system to provide young people with the key skills they need to be able to support them to move on in life. This should be available to all young people, to help both prevent and relieve homelessness.

Homelessness Awareness

Young people should be educated on the issue of homelessness and what to do if they think they, or another peer, is at risk. This could be through specific learning modules or workshops that would be interactive and engaging to reach all.

Training for Teachers

Professionals in the education system should be specifically trained to identify young people in crisis and those at risk of becoming so. They should also have the knowledge of and ability to refer them to the appropriate services so they can get the help they need when they need it.

“Homelessness awareness workshops are also something which I feel are really important to further reduce homelessness. Where I work, we deliver HAW to students in year 9 and up. We receive 100% positive feedback with nearly all of the students having a changed view on the stereotypes of homelessness, more aware of the causes, as well as knowing what to do or where to go if they find themselves in this situation. This is something I feel should be funded everywhere as it could dramatically decrease homelessness in youths.

Abigail, Nottingham”

2. SUPPORT SERVICES WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AT HIGH RISK OF HOMELESSNESS.

The issue

Young people felt that the right support wasn't always there when it was needed through the different stages of our journey - so before, during and after becoming homeless. Having the right type of support available and knowing how to access it is crucial in helping young vulnerable people.

Key Recommendations

Coaches

Young people have wide ranging needs and when they are going through a crisis these can be even more amplified. It is important they have consistent effective support that is versatile and tailored to their needs. This is why mentors and coaches are so important, as they are trained to provide unique support which is flexible and valuable. For example they may help with confidence building, assistance with study or support to engage and understand when things are difficult. Mentors and coaches should be widely accessible. This could be through schools so young people always know where to go first if they are at risk. As described earlier, schools are the best place to engage with young people.

Lead officer

Support needs to be consistent. In crisis cases there should be a lead officer who coordinates the support from different local services, to ensure a joined-up approach, and is a constant contact point for the young person. This will help young people feel more supported, as they always know where to go for help, and increase the chances of easing the homeless crisis.

Ongoing support

Even when a young person is in settled accommodation, some form of support should be available. Knowing support is there if they need it will give the young person confidence to live independently. This support will be much less formal, such as a buddy system, and could be a volunteer scheme run through schools or service providers who deal with young people. This will help prevent young people potentially falling back into the cycle and becoming at risk of being homeless again.

Engagement

Young people should be actively involved in the recruitment and training of staff delivering front line services to young people. This would help to ensure that support providers are skilled at engaging young people. At least one young person should also be invited to sit on the boards of these service providers, to help focus youth engagement and provide first-hand advice.

“

Having a mentor or coach is a great idea. Somebody to support with your emotional, health, relationships and even support through college. A coach would be useful to talk through current issues, to help and advise you to overcome or find solutions to your problems. This would have a huge impact on young people to help progress through difficult times.

Additionally, I feel that having a lead worker who coordinated all of the teams would be really helpful. Having a lead officer to contact and ask what was going on is really important. It would have improved communication between the services so I didn't have to start from the beginning with each and repeat my experiences. If a lead worker was there to support the use of multi-agency work, I could have been housed 3 years earlier.

”

Jodie - Coventry





3. ACCOMMODATION

The issue

There is a clear inconsistency in the availability and quality of accommodation across the country. Often there isn't the right accommodation available when needed to prevent young people from becoming homeless and to help them move on in their lives after becoming homeless.

Key Recommendations

Crash Pads

Family breakdown is the biggest cause of youth homelessness. Having the chance for some time away will help both the young person and their family calm down and may help prevent homelessness occurring. There should be 'crash pads' available where young people can go and stay if they feel things are getting too much, with support available to support the young person back into the family home.

Crisis Accommodation

As much as we should try and prevent youth homelessness, crisis situations will still happen. This can happen suddenly and unexpectedly, and more supported crisis accommodation should be available. This needs to be a flexible service based on the needs of young people as crisis rarely hits between 9 and 5pm.

Affordable accommodation for young people

For young people who can't live with family, you need safe, decent accommodation which is affordable for young people on low incomes.

Renovating empty homes

Young people could be involved in renovating empty homes across the country. This will provide both an interactive and worth-while project for young people to get involved in, developing life skills and making friends, as well as hopefully increasing the amount of suitable and affordable accommodation for young people to occupy.

“

If Crash Pads were available to me when I was younger I wouldn't have been made homeless. I would have had the time out from my hectic family life and this would have enabled me to have the time out I needed and even access some support to work through family problems.

I also believe there should be intervention with the family to highlight family issues and see if there are ways of resolving these. As often the issues are not just with us as young people.

Had there also been the right crisis accommodation for me I would not have spent five years in inappropriate accommodation been moved constantly around. If I had the right accommodation in the first place I believe I would have been able to manage my mental health and be progressing the way I am now back when I was young.

”

Amy, Wells

4. NAVIGATING THE WELFARE BENEFIT SYSTEM

The issue

Due to a lack of awareness from service providers on the wider issues a young person may be facing at a certain time, some support systems are reduced or stopped altogether. This can have a detrimental impact on the lives of young people. For example, a young person with mental health issues may be having a really hard time and due to this may be unable to make scheduled appointments or complete agreed tasks. This may then result in them becoming sanctioned or having certain support stopped. However, if the provider had been aware of the issues were having at that time, they would have been able to factor this and the result may have been entirely different.

Key Recommendations

Communication

If a young person is sanctioned we are often living on an un-realistic amount of money which means we can't pay for the basics like food or rent, which has a huge impact on all areas of our lives. If the job centre are considering sanctioning a young person, they should communicate with the health, housing and support providers first to understand the young person's current situation and so that any impacts of the sanction on their health or wellbeing can be taken into account. This is an example of where our previous recommendation of a lead officer would work really well, as the job centre would always know who to contact and that person would always know what was going on.

Pop up system

There also needs to be better communication across all the services that deal with a young person, as they all need to be aware of particular issues a young person is facing at a given time. A universal system that flags up issues to all services involved with a young person will ensure that everyone is well informed at all times, and that young people don't have vital services and support stopped due to a wider issue.

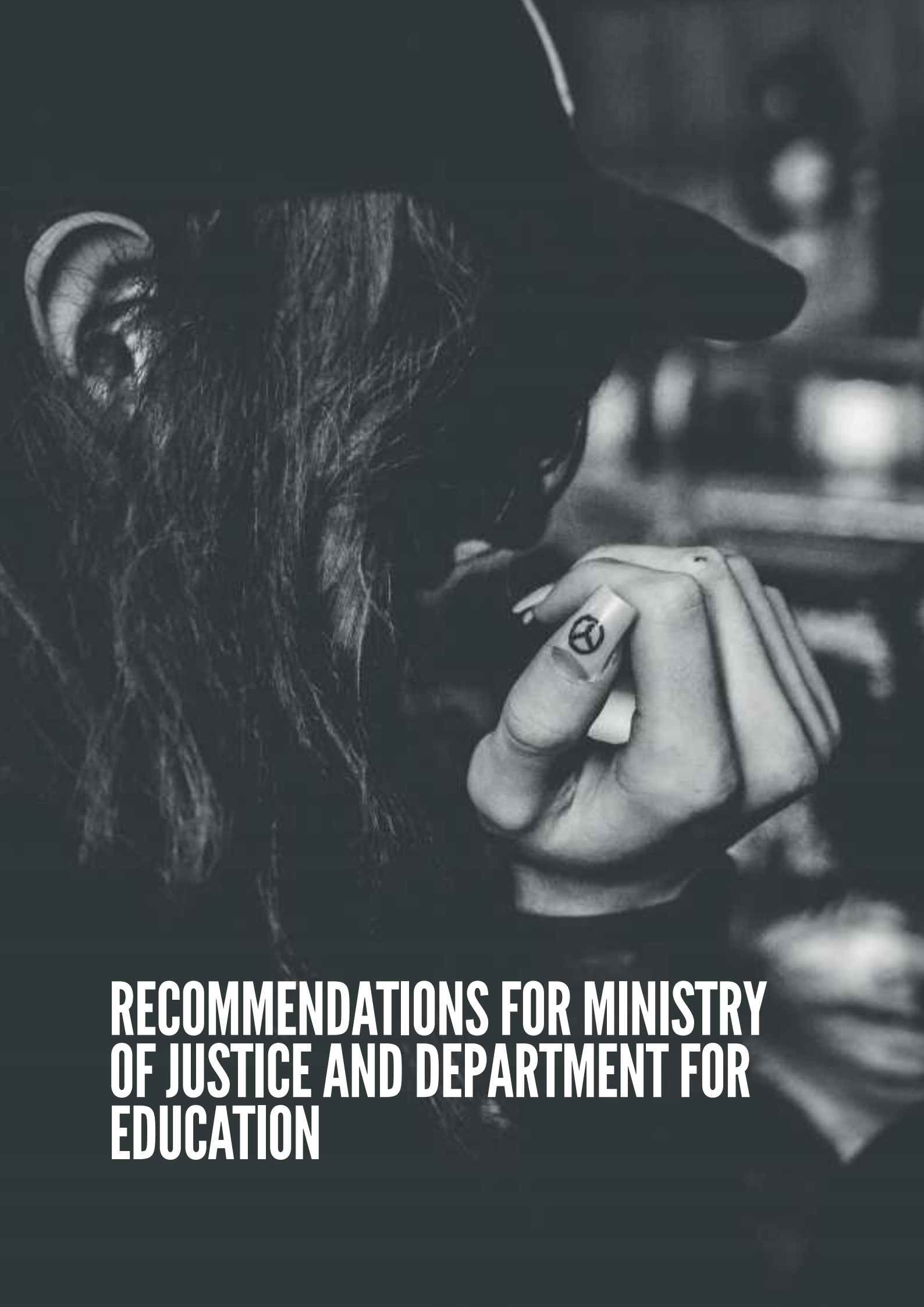
Additional Questions

The Youth Homeless parliament were also asked to look into two specific issues, from the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education, on how to better support young vulnerable people.

“A lead officer would be able to cut down waiting times on the phone as cases would be known. They would also be familiar with young people and the issues that we face, aiming for a more approachable contact to ensure we can work together.

Sharing of information would be helpful as often providers cannot easily communicate with job centers themselves. If this was the case my mental health and support needs would have been communicated and this would have prevented an inappropriate referral to an activity that led to me having no income.

”
Andrew, Nathan - Newhaven



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

1. EARLY INTERVENTION FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS

Early Intervention

Young people from across the country strongly believe there needs to be more informal education for all groups of young people in the form of interactive workshops which cover a range of issues including criminal behaviour and consequences. There is a need to invest in positive recreational activities that are free to young people through youth services. Young people who may be at “risk” of offending should have intense and flexible support at a young age which helps them find other activities of interest and builds on their skills and talents. There also needs to be access to peer mentors and coaches as we have previously discussed.

A choice of accommodation and location

Young people should have a say in the type and location of accommodation they are assigned when they come out of prison. If they are placed in an area linked to people they knew previously they are more likely to reoffend. Involving young people in the decision process about where they will live gives them the best opportunity to re-engage and not to re-offend.

Access to work and training

Young people with a criminal record find that when they go for job interviews etc. most interviewers automatically switch off once they disclose their criminal history. Employment is vital to help these young people get on in life, and having a steady income means they are much less likely to re-offend. There should be specific work and training opportunities for young people that are ex-offenders to help re build their lives.

Out of hours support system

As we said earlier, crisis doesn't always hit between 9 and 5pm. Having an out of hour's support system in place, and knowing who to go to, will alleviate the risk of young people becoming at risk and re-offending because they had nowhere to turn for help.

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I have been out of prison for nearly a year. I moved in to the YMCA in November last year. This is my third time at the YMCA and I now want the support which the YMCA offers me. The staff have helped me realise that I don't want to live a life of being in and out of prison. I see my probation officer weekly as I am on a 12 month suspended sentence. I am involved in the YMCA Project as a fundraiser. I volunteer in the kitchen at the YMCA serving meals for the residents.

My main focus for the future is to keep my anger under control, gain employment and get access to see my daughter.

”

Shane, London.

2. CARE LEAVERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Culture change

Young people often feel stigmatised if they have been in care. They feel they are often categorised and pre-judged to be “chaotic people who are always angry”. This can then result in them not getting the support they need to move on, as service providers or potential employers and landlords don’t offer them the same opportunities they would to those who hadn’t been in care, believing them to be a “safer” option. There needs to be a culture change to refresh the way society views care leavers and ensures that they are provided with the support they need and the same options as everyone else.

Life skills are imperative

We have already said how important life skills are, and these are even more so for young care leavers as they are more likely to miss out on these valuable life lessons due to not living in the normal home environment. As well as being offered through schools, advanced life skills classes should be available to young people currently in care to ensure they are prepared for life after care. This would help them feel more confident about living independently and help them to move on in life.

“*I feel that I was given limited availability of accommodation due to the instant moves and because of being in care you are automatically placed into hostels and other supported accommodation.*

My education had been negatively impacted on because I was not engaging as much, as being in foster care I found it difficult to concentrate on my studies due to the changes in my home life.

I choose not to disclose that I’m a care leaver as I felt like I was an outsider and didn’t want to be prejudged or stigmatised.

Chantelle”



NEXT STEPS FOR THE MINISTERIAL WORKING GROUP TO CONSIDER:

The Youth Homeless Parliament offered a very positive experience for young people, but it is also important for them to see that their work will have an impact on the work of central and local government; making a real difference to the experiences of other young people who are at risk of homelessness now or in the future.

At a local level there are opportunities to share recommendations with local authorities, directly and also through the St Basils Youth Homeless Advisory work which DCLG funds.

At a national level, we would like the Ministerial Working Group to respond to the recommendations that have been made, as they do not only relate to DCLG but to other Government Departments.

In future we would welcome other Ministers from other Government Departments and politicians attending the Youth Homeless Parliament, as youth homelessness is very rarely just about a lack of housing - it is much more complex and requires a cross-Government response.

YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT ASK

The Youth Homeless Parliament ask that the Ministerial Working Group and relevant Departments support the implementation of the recommendations, across the country; to best support the prevention of youth homeless and better meet the needs of vulnerable young people.

“When Marcus Jones walked in a sigh of relief escaped many mouths, followed by the hush hush of every authoritative figure to try and quieten the room buzzing with excitement. The nerves of most people present were almost visible in the air above us all, but somehow, we managed to keep it together, long enough to present our findings for change and a few brave souls to share their lived experiences. As each speaker rose and fell, you could witness everyone’s eyes following the next speaker, to the next. Success. The rehearsal paid off. Marcus Jones responded to almost every statement spoken and thoroughly respected us all as individuals. Almost everyone walked out excited at the prospect of hearing back from the MP, to see how our words and ideas could make a difference. Who knows? We do know that we have all done our part to bring about change, and we will continue to do that, at least I will, for as long as I can.

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Youth Voice, Emily, Preston Lancashire





YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT FACILITATED BY



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