



YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT REPORT 2018

**YOU¹
TH
VOICE**
SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

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 Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government formerly known as 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 Youth Voice Team and involves a wide range of agencies and young people across England, enables 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.

The newly appointed Minister Heather Wheeler, Parliamentary under Secretary of State (Minister for Housing and Homelessness) invited young people to attend Westminster on 27th March 2018.

The Youth Homeless Parliament were delighted to be invited and to meet the new Minister and saw this as a fantastic opportunity to showcase the Youth Voice and partnership with Government.



NATIONAL PREPARATION FOR YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

St Basils launched their new brand “Youth Voice” on 21st February 2018. This event incorporated elements of St Basils Engagement projects, allowing St Basils residents and young people from our National engagement activities to become more aware of the engagement opportunities, ‘Youth Voice’ offers both locally and nationally. The Youth Homeless Parliament consultation was also completed at this event. Consultations took place to seek the perspectives of young people about various topics.

The National young peoples consultation.

Young people from across England, as part of the Youth Homeless Parliament have been tasked by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to answer four questions and offer recommendations. The aim was to find out what impact homelessness has on a young person’s health and well-being; and what support should be made available to best support them. Young people were asked to address four key areas:

1. Services that will positively impact the health and wellbeing of young people, prior to becoming homeless or during their homelessness journey
2. Barriers young people face when accessing health services and how technology could help to improve accessibility
3. The impact of social media on a young person’s health and wellbeing before they become homeless and during their homelessness journey
4. How Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender + status could impact a young homeless person’s experience.

100+ young people took part in the consultations which were held by the Youth Voice Team and also consultations took place up and down the country hosted by our partner organisations. The consultations have supported the development of the annual Parliamentary report.



THE BIG DAY 27TH MARCH 2018

This year's Youth Homeless Parliament took place in the House of Commons, Westminster, London, on Tuesday 27th March 2018. The atmosphere was filled with excitement as the Youth Homeless Parliament members made their way into the committee room and their young voices filled the chamber. Members discussed issues affecting homeless young people; sharing inspirational and powerful lived experiences with Heather Wheeler, Parliamentary under Secretary of State (Minister for Housing and Homelessness) and Government officials.

This was followed by a question and answer session with civil servants where the young people had the opportunity to ask directly about their concerns and any questions they had about issues surrounding youth homelessness.

Officials from the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport then hosted a workshop with the Youth Homeless Parliament members to understand how they thought social investment could be used to positively tackle youth homelessness.

The Youth Homeless Parliament was attended by 34 young people representing the 100 consultees from across England. These partner organisations were: Centrepont, Depaul UK, Forum Housing, No Limits, Roundabout, Sanctuary Supported Living, St Mungo's, St Basils and YMCA England.



WELCOME SPEECH EMILY TROWELL

Introduction

Today is an extraordinary day in which we, as a collective, have come together in order to make change. Change for the masses that we humbly represent. We are a collective of voices that have all felt the life altering grasp of homelessness, be that in the past or the present. Today you will bear witness to a portion of our collective, sharing the experiences they have endured throughout a period of darkness in their lives; in response to the policies set forth, in order to diminish the possibility that others may experience the same trauma that we have blossomed from. To become homeless was not a choice of our own, however, we have emerged from the ashes as the phoenix; eager to protect others and live another life removing the possibility to return to the darkness.

We may be stigmatised, we may be just another number on a page of statistics and we may be told frequently how strong we are for 'just getting on with it' but this is our lives. We will carry this with us for a significantly long time, possibly afraid to share our lives with others because of our varying situations. However, out of this negativity, has come the possibility for us to change the future. We have travelled here today, to help to change the prejudices against

homelessness, to help change the policies that affect our lives, and to change the future for the every young person that becomes homeless in the UK.

We are proud of how far we have already come with homelessness, and we, in this room today are evidence of the passion that burns inside young people to make change. However, there are many more things that need to be changed, in order to achieve equality throughout the public of the United Kingdom. We are here today as a collective of youth voices to represent the faces of the statistics we have become, enabling us to work alongside Government agencies like yourselves, to inform the policies that ultimately affect us. Hear the experiences of our lives that aren't always clear to see and to simply converse with you. Our experiences are real and our experiences are powerful. As are the charities that have supported us throughout our journies and will continue to do so until the issues surrounding youth homelessness are eradicated. We are here today to take the hundredth step in a journey that will take one thousand steps, but we are here. Doing what we can, as experts in our field; through this journey, collaboration with yourselves and conversations of today, for the future, we will eventually create brighter, better and more successful lives for homeless young people. Thank you.



YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT REPORT 2018

Introduction

The Youth Homeless Parliament has historically brought together 100 young people from across England, contributing varied perspectives from diverse backgrounds, cultures and locations. This year sees a different format where over 100 young people, from across England, consulted on key questions asked by Government, of which 30 of us are here today; the information gained was collated to inform this report.

There are a number of reasons as to why young people may become homeless; for example family breakdown, financial difficulty, mental health issues and leaving care. Therefore young people who are homeless are often vulnerable as they do not have established support networks in place. The Youth Homeless Parliament is pleased to be openly addressing issues that directly affect the LGBT+ Community as this has not been independently discussed with us, prior to now. We hope this opens the door for further discussion around other vulnerable groups, for future Youth Homeless Parliament consultations.

Service Provision to Impact the Health and Wellbeing of Young People

The topic

The Youth Homeless Parliament were asked to identify support services or activities that would positively impact our health and well-being, in the lead up to becoming homeless, or during our homelessness journey, and to offer recommendations on these.

Key Recommendations

Service approach

We feel that local support services should be consistent and efficient, offering an empathetic, flexible and non-discriminative approach. As the consultation took place across England, it was noted that some areas receive a higher quality of service than others, identifying the need for regulated service standards across the board. It was also suggested that established support services should offer facilities, such as:

- Respite care spaces for young people and families prior to crisis striking;
- Youth clubs which incorporate intergenerational work with opportunities for young people to engage;
- Advertising information materials, within youth focused areas, to ensure young people are aware

of how to access the appropriate help and support

There should be 'Youth Homeless Officers', who are specifically trained to deal with 'health and homelessness'; who have expertise and networks in the mental health field as well as housing and support knowledge. It is vital that young people are offered holistic and wrap around support when accessing homelessness services. This will enable young people to be directed promptly to the most appropriate service for their specific support needs, to ensure a smooth transition to independent living.

Education

We have recommendations around the education system; specifically discussing schools and apprenticeships in relation to young people's health and wellbeing. Young people across the country feel that, specific support is needed to help reduce the stigma faced by homeless young people; as this has a detrimental impact on our lives. Schools are encouraged to review. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum; subjects around mental health, substance misuse, homelessness and housing should be actively taught and delivered by experts with experience.

Schools need to establish peer mentoring facilities

which incorporate healthy and positive relationship training. This will empower young people to recognise and identify both healthy and unhealthy signs, which may affect their mental health and wellbeing. Young people need to have the tools that equip them to actively identify issues and seek help prior to a relationship breakdown.

The Youth Homeless Parliament feels that there is a need to address issues around apprenticeships. Apprenticeships need to be counted as education, not employment. As in the current format apprenticeships are an unrealistic option for those in supported housing and young people living independently.

Health: GPs

Reducing waiting times and extending consultation times with vulnerable patients could positively impact the health and wellbeing of young people in GP surgeries; as young people experiencing homelessness are likely to be at risk of multiple and co-occurring physical or mental health needs. We would like to suggest a range of treatments to be offered, to reduce the amount of medication given to us for issues including mental health and substance misuse. Alternative treatments could be; prescribed sports coaching, mindfulness courses and talking therapies.





Having the opportunity to attend young people exclusive surgeries and clinics would help us to feel less intimidated in normal ‘all age group’ surgeries. These surgeries should be relaxing environments offering services to young people such as drop in clinics; where homeless young people are able to register on the day, even without a permanent address. Enable us to access medical treatment immediately, rather than waiting weeks or even months to register and receive treatment.

Health and wellbeing services:

NHS health and wellbeing services should make available a range of targeted services for homeless and vulnerable young people. This should include regular access to free fitness facilities or sport and leisure facilities, drop in group counselling services, as well as free prescriptions and/or financial aid for students and homeless young people. There needs to be a development of youth delivered initiatives such as; establishing peer led panels and or boards within the NHS; to ensure that young people are engaged and able to share their lived experiences to GPs and NHS services. It is important that services are youth focused and engage young people, encouraging us to be core members of design and delivery as well as having opportunities to scrutinise services.

Barriers to Accessing Health Services and Technological Improvements

Topic 2

The Youth Homeless Parliament were asked to identify barriers which we face whilst accessing health support services, as well as how technology could help to improve the accessibility of these facilities.

Key Recommendations

Personal Barriers

We have identified a number of personal barriers that stop us accessing health related services, these are: lack of knowledge and communication around service provision, what to expect from services and how we can deal with the impact of safeguarding incidents. This is so we are not left questioning whether we are receiving the most appropriate support for our needs.

Fear of being judged, rejected or being seen as a burden to the health system makes some of us feel uncomfortable about disclosing information, just in case this may be used against us Therefore, this puts us off accessing some services as it affects our confidence and self-esteem. We recommend looking at accessibility of services, through the eyes of young people.

Accessing some health services may be difficult due to negative cultural or religious views associated with mental health, substance misuse and sexual health. Causing us to feel judgement from community members when entering or

leaving these services.

Young people on low incomes cannot always afford to purchase prescriptions, therefore we feel as though accessing health services cannot be a priority, even if we need treatment urgently.

Environment

The environment and accessibility of services is often a barrier to young people. The identified areas are when young people live in a village or town in which the appropriate services are outside of their local area, this often makes it difficult for us to access. There is often judgement and stigma received from neighbours or external agencies when accessing services that are aware of our homelessness status.

Service

We feel that there is a common theme when discussing health support services, such as mental health and substance misuse, as there is a lack of knowledge of appeals processes which can prevent us from potentially receiving the support we need. There is clear recommendation that services need to look at their communication and information sharing, to ensure that we receive the support we need, having the ability and confidence to appeal and complain.

Young people often feel let down or unsupported by some services. As staff have large caseloads resulting in them being overworked and not having the time to listen to the needs of the young people.

We feel that the accessibility of services should be flexible

to accommodate young people who are in employment or education, making sure we do not need to take time off work to attend specialised health support services.

Technology

Young people across England are in agreement that the use of technology is vitally important to reduce some of the barriers that we have outlined. Services and organisations needs to adapt to the ever changing world of young people. For example technology could support with; access to a user friendly website that acts as a ‘one stop shop’ holding all relevant information around health support services, young people’s rights and contact information in one place. The website should be easy to find and easy to share via social media websites. Young people should have the ability to access online services using young people friendly communication methods, for example, facetime, skype or a health application. These could be used to book appointments online, speak with GPs and receive online consultations or repeat prescriptions.

Some of us noted that having access to technology may not always be possible whilst homeless, as the internet and smart phones are not always affordable or a priority for those without stable accommodation. Expanding the accessibility of face-to-face services, as well as developing technology, will ensure that services are meeting the needs of as many young people as possible.



Topic 3

The Youth Homeless Parliament looked at ways in which social media impacted our lives before becoming homeless and during our homelessness journey.

Key Recommendations **Before homelessness**

Social media is such a big part of our lives and affects us regardless of our housing situation.

Before becoming homeless, social media impacted some of us by helping us to obtain advice around homelessness, as we were able to access videos and speeches, find directions and information of organisations and emergency contact details. Social media allowed us to discuss issues with people we did not know, without feeling judged and to gain another perspective. In turn, this unofficial peer mentoring approach helped us to raise our expectations and aspirations and set realistic goals for the future.

However, before we became homeless, due to society's view of homelessness, we feel that social media caused us to feel some judgement towards homeless young people, by reinforcing the negative

preconceived stereotypes and judgements shared around this issue, leading us to internalise these judgements now.

During homelessness

Once we became homeless, the impact of social media changed. We became more aware of homelessness organisations and support groups, allowing us to share advice around life topics healthy eating, fitness how to access some services, how to raise awareness of homelessness, as well as opening up communication channels between family members, where we could not do face-to-face before. Social media has not always had a positive impact on us, as some young people expressed their discomfort around seeing updates from family members on Facebook or other platforms when they are no longer a part of the family unit.

Trends such as 'goals' and the promotion of 'fakenews' has had a detrimental effect on our self-esteem and personal judgement, as we unintentionally start to compare our own lives to those of other young people on social media. Many of the young people from Youth Homeless Parliament stated that they have experienced cyber bullying and

trolling. Often there is a lack of online support to stop this quickly and effectively.

There has been agreement around concerns for the lack of research regarding how negative experiences of social media can impact young people in the long term; we propose that this area is explored to help establish a clearer understanding of this. We feel that online advice or chat services should be widely promoted; incorporating a peer mentoring service, giving young people the opportunity to speak to experts with experience, as well as specially trained staff to facilitate and regulate discussion and advice. A number of Youth Homeless Parliament members have shared their experiences of using similar models for mental health services, when they were unable to immediately access face-to-face services.

Topic 4

Being homeless and LGBT+

The Youth Homeless Parliament was asked to discuss what effect being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender+ could have on a young person's homelessness experience. The youth homeless

parliament is made up of a diverse range of young people, including those from the LGBT+ community; therefore we have offered a perspective from both LGBT+ and non-LGBT+ young people.

LGBT+ Perspective

Youth Homeless Parliament members identified within the LGBT+ community stated that they received both negative and positive experiences throughout their homelessness journey. These young people stated that once their LGBT+ status was disclosed, positive experiences have included; being supported and advised by other LGBT+ members with similar experiences; opportunities to get involved in projects and activities to raise awareness, in turn, feeling more comfortable with their own identity; feeling unique and confident enough to develop friendships and positive networks. Young people have also stated that it is essential to have supportive staff for LGBT+ young people, to ensure that all elements of the homeless LGBT+ experience are met with an informed, understanding and non-judgemental approach.

However, there are some negative experiences stated by our LGBT+ members. These include;



increased anxiety when entering into social situations or supported accommodation. Young people felt that they have been refused or received inconsistent support from staff at supported accommodation. LGBT+ status has been identified as a key reason for exclusion from the family home. Young people from this community have experienced physical, verbal or at times sexual abuse from peers and are subject to 'double stigma' due to being homeless and of LGBT+ status, which has a detrimental effect.

Non- LGBT+ Perspective:

Young people not inclusive of the LGBT+ status have felt that young people within this community receive mostly negative experiences alongside their homelessness status. Young people felt that their LGBT+ peers may experience feelings of intimidation when moving into supported accommodation; often these young people may feel isolated as others do not always know how to approach their sexuality within conversation. Young people that did not identify as LGBT+ believe that LGBT+ young people may receive discrimination or prejudice due to ignorance around this experience; and or be treated

unequally by staff in supported accommodation due to the staff's cultural and religious beliefs or personal values.

Recommendation

We were asked to identify suggestions of support to be incorporated into mainstream services to help improve the wellbeing of LGBT+ young people, these are:

To establish a larger number of support groups both face to face and online including a mix of LGBT+ and Non-LGBT+ members, where young people could openly discuss experiences around homelessness and sexuality.

To ensure that Government and non-Government agencies adhere to a zero tolerance policy around discrimination with this community, encouraging young people to be safe in a positive, open and non-judgemental environment. To ensure appropriate support is offered to each young person based on their individual needs by homeless organisations, health and online services.

To develop advertisements for television and social media to raise awareness of how to help homeless young people, including those with LGBT+ status.



REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY YOUNG PEOPLE SAID

Emily, St Basils Birmingham

I was very excited about attending Youth Homeless Parliament, exploring the issues affecting young homeless people and giving feedback to the Government with my fellow peers. I was able to speak this year directly to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, it felt good as we are changing other people's lives.

Zinnia, Centrepont Sunderland

I think Youth Homeless Parliament went well and I loved being a part of it. It's important for young people to have a voice and to help other young people attending the Youth Homeless Parliament is a great way to do that.

Keisha, Roundabout Sheffield

The Youth Homeless Parliament was great because everybody was really friendly and were interested in my experiences of homelessness.

Safia, Roundabout Sheffield

I thought that the Youth Homeless Parliament was really good and I liked listening to people's real life experiences which I could relate to.

Joshua, Centrepont Manchester

I found the day at Youth Homeless Parliament productive and knowledgeable and good for gaining insight. This opportunity created inspiration throughout the attendees from the different regions of England, allowing for the myriad of issues that need to be addressed, be raised. It will be interesting to see the result of our hard work and I hope something can be developed for individuals living on the streets, I am excited to be a part of this.



REFLECTIONS OF THE DAY PROFESSIONALS SAID

Professionals

The Youth Homeless Parliament is always well supported by professionals in the sector and from our partner organisations. It was fantastic to see professionals attend the event and eagerly listen to the voices of young people up and down the country.

Tolaya Johnson, Learning Skills and Work Officer for St Basils

This is my 4th year supporting the Youth Homeless Parliament event, and I always look forward to such a positive experience with some very inspirational young people and staff.

I am really passionate about working with young people and supporting them to build the resilience, skills, and confidence needed to live work and achieve independently.

The most important part of the day for me is hearing the lived experiences, powerful stories and voices from our young people on what they are facing in society today. These issues always touch me deeply, because I am very passionate when it comes to improving the lives and education of our youth. Finally, I am so proud of all the young people who engaged in the event, they not only came together as a group, but they supported each other and united as one, which was so overwhelming for me”.

Karen Saunders, Health and Wellbeing Programme Lead/Public Health Specialist Public Health England

“Public Health England (PHE) in the West Midlands were privileged to attend the 2018 Youth Homeless Parliament to consult upon the Green Paper setting out Government’s ambition that children and young people who need help for their mental health are able to get it when they need it (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/transforming-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-provision-a-green-paper>). The resulting candid, raw, brave and often harrowing responses from Parliament members provided invaluable and constructive insight into their lived experience of mental health and health services, highlighting a range of significant challenges for us system leaders and decision makers. Parliament

members also made suggestions as to how to improve the health; wellbeing and resilience of young people experiencing homelessness. We must carry on listening hard to these difficult messages harness and champion the energy and commitment of bodies such as the Youth Homelessness Parliament. We already know that homeless people have some of the highest and costliest health needs but these needs are often overlooked when health services are planned and commissioned (https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Homeless%20Health%20Needs%20Audit%20toolkit_0.pdf). The discussion also served as a stark reminder that effective prevention requires action across several fronts: poverty; parenting; education; employment; housing; health etc. and across Government Departments we should continue to enable these joined up conversations.”

Natasha Holder, National Housing Federation.

The Youth Homeless Parliament was fantastic.

The personal testimonies from children around the country who faced homelessness were a well-needed and inspirational reminder of why we need urgent action.

Innovative solutions came directly from the young people themselves. They spoke passionately through the lens of their own personal experience, putting forward ideas and solutions that could have a genuine impact on young people who find themselves in a similar situation.

Jennifer Harris, Research Manager Homeless link

‘The Youth Homelessness Parliament event is crucial in ensuring that young people’s voices are at the forefront of efforts to tackle youth homelessness. Initiatives aiming to

prevent and respond to youth homelessness are most likely to be effective when based on listening and responding to young people’s personal needs and views on support and policy responses.’

Kris Heskett, Senior Volunteering Officer (North East) Centrepoint

The Youth Homeless Parliament is a fantastic democratic platform for young people to speak directly to people with the power to make decisions that will affect their lives and to reflect for themselves how their elected representatives operate. The young people from Centrepoint took their own representative roles as voices for other young people very seriously; they spent time preparing themselves and thinking about how to get their views and recommendations across clearly. It also served as another opportunity

for their own personal development and pushing themselves to speak publicly in Westminster in front of an MP and civil servants elevated their self-confidence to another level. The smaller YHP worked well and retained the levels of energy, passion, and enthusiasm of previous parliaments and the workshops and feedback were great to see – I think the support staff would have liked to have had their own workshop group to contribute to the issue being explored – this could have been an interesting reference point and development tool for the young people (and civil servants) too.



OUR ASK

The Youth Homeless Parliament ASK that the Minister Heather Wheeler MP and The Ministry continue to consult with young people and provide young people with the opportunity to share their lived experiences to help shape and develop government policy.

That young people have the continued opportunity to work in partnerships with Government to bring about change.

The Youth Homeless Parliament would love to see more engagement through other government departments such as Department for Health, Department for Education and Department for Work and Pensions.





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 Voice National

St Basils
Youth Voice
Heathmill Lane
Deritend
Birmingham
B9 4AX

Tel: 0121 772 2483

info@stbasils.org.uk
www.stbasils.org.uk
www.youth-voice.co.uk

Charity No: 1080154
Homes and Communities Agency No: H3994
Company Limited By Guarantee No: 3964376
and Registered in England

Publication June 2018