

**YOU
TH
VOICE**

SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

**2020
YOUTH
HOMELESS
PARLIAMENT**



MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

KELLY TOLHURST MP

It was a real privilege to attend this year's virtual Youth Homeless Parliament, in my first month as the new Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing. Firstly, I would like to extend a huge thank you to all the brilliant young people who spoke so eloquently of their experiences and for sharing their ideas for the future. I would also like to thank St Basil's for their continued commitment to improving the lives of homeless young people and for running an excellent event for the seventh year running. Of course, this year came with extra challenges. I was impressed by the fantastic effort of Marvin and all those who featured for producing a fantastic video in such difficult circumstances, to present the Youth Homeless Parliament's recommendations and enable the event to go ahead. Thank you to Jean for expertly chairing an online event with so many voices.

I was particularly moved by some of the personal stories shared. It was appalling to hear that Declan was mistreated because of his race - this is unacceptable. Kayne's reflections on mental health and trauma were very powerful. Keisha's fight to stay in education showed the impact teachers and support workers can have. The community created to support one another is a credit to the Youth Homeless Parliament team.

Youth Homeless Parliament members made it clear that 'everyone deserves a place to live that is decent' and this Government is committed to ensuring everyone has a roof over their head and ending rough sleeping this parliament.

I was pleased to see the Youth Homeless Parliament's recommendation on early intervention. This is something this government is committed to - in 2018 the Homelessness Reduction Act, including the duty to

refer, came into force with the aim of shifting the culture to one of preventing homelessness before it occurs. Our recent review has shown that households are now receiving help both earlier and for longer: over 140,000 households have had their homelessness successfully prevented. St Basil's have worked with MHCLG to ensure local authorities prioritise prevention at the heart of tackling youth homelessness.

I was moved by the candid honesty of Youth Homeless Parliament members in talking about their experiences of mental health problems and recognise it is crucial for effective support to accompany housing. I am pleased that NHS England has dedicated £30million for specialist mental health services for people sleeping rough. My department is working to ensure that Supported Accommodation, providing safety and wraparound support, is available to vulnerable young people. Our £12.2billion investment in affordable housing over the next 5 years includes our £11.5billion new programme, where 10% of delivery will be used to increase the supply of much needed specialist or supported housing.

I am really pleased that the Youth Homeless Parliament video will be shared with all MPs across the country so they can hear the stories too. MHCLG will consider the Youth Homeless Parliament's recommendations and share with other relevant government departments. So, thank you again to the young people involved for sharing their video and the report, and to St Basil's and Youth Voice for this year's event, it gave me real insight into my new portfolio, and I look forward to working together in the coming year.

Kelly Tolhurst MP

CHAIRS WELCOME JEAN TEMPLETON



Early preparation started this year with a 2 day event in February when young people from around the country gathered in Birmingham to share their experiences and discuss what works and what doesn't and develop their recommendations for change. It seems strange to talk about such a collective event now as the world changed so dramatically in March.

Not put off by the inability to hold the event in Westminster, Youth Homeless Parliament Members decided to make a film to represent their key issues, recommendations and link them

to their lived experience. Using phones, sometimes dodgy wifi and great determination, they scripted, filmed and edited the 26 minute film shown to Minister Kelly Tolhurst on 23rd September at the 2020 virtual Youth Homeless Parliament.

The film is inspiring and we are very grateful to Minister Tolhurst for her hugely positive response and support, particularly encouraging wide distribution of the film to parliamentarians and decision-makers.

Although a very different experience this year, I feel that the legacy may be even greater, as wide distribution of the film contributes to the understanding which hopefully will lead to action for change.

Sincere thanks to the Minister, her officers, our partners and most importantly Youth Homeless Parliament Members who make this event possible.

Jean Templeton
Chair, Youth Homeless Parliament

THE HISTORY



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 project is funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government 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 VIRTUAL YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

23RD SEPTEMBER 2020

Preparation for the Youth Homeless Parliament began back in February, with a two day training session bringing together young people from across the country with an experience of homelessness. Here, young people worked on confidence and team building exercises to create a supportive environment in which to share with each other their experiences of homelessness. Through sharing their experiences, both the good and bad, they identified common themes and these became the basis for the 2020 Youth Homeless Report. Delving further into those themes, the young people identified good practise and recommendations around early intervention, supported accommodation, mental health and wellbeing, further and higher education, benefits and work, and post-independent support. It is those recommendations that make up this report.

Due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, a physical meeting of the Youth Homeless Parliament was not possible and so some six months later, the Parliament moved online. The group mobilised themselves and recorded their lived experiences

and report findings; no small feat with social distancing, a lack of professional equipment and the group scattered across the country. Members joined Kelly Tolhurst MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Rough Sleeping and Housing where they premiered the short film they had produced, which included powerful stories of young people's lived experience and summarised their key recommendations.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Rough Sleeping and Housing thanked the group for their hard work and fed back how the government was taking steps to address some of the issues raised in the video report. She was keen that the video was circulated widely to help inform parliamentarians and decision-makers.

Despite the unusual circumstances, the event was a real success.

You can view the Youth Homeless Parliament Virtual film here
www.stbasils.org.uk/services/youthvoice

INTRODUCTION



Commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the 2020 Youth Homeless Parliament seeks to build on the recommendations from last year's report. The 2019 report sought to consider responses from a large number of young people who had experienced homelessness, and many of the topics still continue to be a concern for young people.

For the 2020 Youth Homeless Parliament, it was agreed to deep dive into the experiences of young people, exploring in depth some of these similar experiences. Discussing their experiences, Youth Homeless Parliament members divided the areas of their discussions into six topics, making recommendations for each of them. The six topics discussed were; early intervention, supported accommodation, mental health and wellbeing, further / higher education, benefits and work, and post-independence support. Through

exploring their lived experiences with one another, the young people were able to extract recurring problems, making recommendations from their own experiences that would improve services for young people. These recommendations seek to avoid young people becoming homeless in the first place, but also make the experience for young people who find themselves homeless to be less traumatic.

A number of young people who have experienced homelessness from across the country were invited to a two-day team building and consultation workshop to discuss their lived experiences of homelessness. At the session there were young people from rural areas and major British cities, a variety of ages between 16 - 25 years old, as well as different sexualities, genders and ethnicities. This group of 32 young people make up the 2020 Youth Homeless Parliament cohort.

A young man with dark hair, wearing a dark denim jacket over a patterned shirt, stands against a red brick wall. The wall is the primary background, with a dark blue or black border on the left and right sides. The man is looking slightly to his right with a subtle smile.

TOPIC ONE

EARLY INTERVENTION

For some young people, they felt that there was a lack of recognition of the signs of potential homelessness and acting quickly enough to either prevent the problem or reduce the circumstances. A common topic was family breakdown that ultimately resulted in young people's homelessness, with some left out of conversations around issues like family homes being repossessed, but also a failure in schools to talk about issues like mental health and homeless support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homeless Parliament members recommended that a person-centred approach, which looked at the needs and strengths of the individual and allowed them to continue with positive aspects of their lives, would be best. Raising awareness of the potential signs of homelessness to young people and where to go for support was something which Youth Homeless Parliament members felt would be valuable.

A young man with dark hair and glasses is shown in profile, smiling and leaning against a textured wall. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The text 'TOPIC TWO SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION' is centered in white, bold, sans-serif font.

TOPIC TWO
SUPPORTED
ACCOMMODATION

The young people recognised that the lifeline of supported accommodation was valuable and some had very positive experiences. However there were inconsistencies with the support and the environments at different centres. Some young people told of problems with anti-social behaviour within supported accommodation that was not tackled and that more vulnerable residents were preyed on by other residents and encouraged to join in this bad behaviour. This, along with a lack of security measures in some centres made young people feel unsafe.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homeless Parliament members recommended that there should be a set of standards developed for supported housing, informed by young people; there should be regular checks into private supported accommodation, as safety and security were critical to young people and to have their voice heard and acted upon by management was important. A need for balance between privacy and social integration areas to make people feel less isolated, was considered important. Flexible models of accommodation, including the ability to bring key items of furniture.

There was also a feeling that much of the supported accommodation was focused on large populations, like cities. Young homeless people from rural and more urban areas both talked about the need for supported accommodation which was close to existing support networks, education facilities and their work.

A smiling woman with a braid, wearing a black jacket, is the central focus of the image. She is positioned against a solid red background, which is framed by a yellow border. The text 'TOPIC THREE' is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the middle of the image. Below it, the words 'MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING' are written in smaller, white capital letters, spaced out across two lines.

TOPIC THREE
MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLBEING

Many, if not most, of the young people who find themselves homeless have suffered a traumatic upbringing or incident which has led them to be homeless. Youth Homeless Parliament members talked about a chaotic upbringing, family breakdowns, the death of a caregiver or having lived in the care system. As well as dealing with the practicalities and trauma of being homeless, the reason for the young person becoming homeless is often traumatic too. This results in young people having to deal with a lot of difficult circumstances and emotions, often on top of a mental health problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preventative measures, rather than reactive ones were preferred, with young people recommending qualified mental health workers be co-located in schools and supported housing who would be able to spot warning signs and direct young people to immediate support. Young people also wanted to see a wellness recovery action plan designed for those with mental health problems to fill in gaps between services and ensure they stay on the road to recovery.



TOPIC FOUR
FURTHER / HIGHER
EDUCATION

Like many young people, those who find themselves homeless still aspire to further education, but they often face extra challenges without the 'bank of mum and dad' or family support, particularly in terms of finance and in the case of university, a home to go to during holidays and between academic years.

Young people felt that there was an overall lack of support for those who have to be self-sufficient, compared to those coming from more stable backgrounds. Some young homeless people found that if they were able to attend higher education, they struggled to afford costs for books and materials as student loans did not stretch to cover these as well as rent, bills and food. But because these young people were studying full-time they were not eligible for benefits and struggled to balance working enough hours and studying. This could be even more difficult for young people in further education.

This was further exacerbated by a return to temporary homelessness, as student tenancies don't cover the summer months and some do not cover the term time breaks. This leaves young people without a family home to return to with nowhere to go and perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.

Whilst some students were made aware of hardship funds at college or university, this was often not something which was made available from the beginning of the academic year and was often a small amount as an emergency, rather than stable support for people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homeless Parliament members felt that there needed to be extra support for those who were without family support, with accommodation being provided for young people who did not have a family home to return to. More financial support was also considered important, with grants and hardship funds made available from the start of the course. Young people also felt that there needed to be extra emotional and mental health support for those who came from disadvantaged backgrounds and may lack the emotional support network available to others.



TOPIC FIVE
BENEFITS AND
WORK

Many young people told of similar experiences of problems accessing the benefits system or the benefits system actively working to dissuade the young people from learning and working and contributing as much as they could. The balance between trying to live, work and, in many cases, stay in full-time education, was a difficult balancing act. Minimum wage set at a lower threshold for young people, and Universal Credit provides less incentive for young people to work more than a few hours a week in order not to be penalised further on rent costs or losing benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homeless Parliament members talked about how frustrated they were and wanted to fully contribute to society, and not rely on benefits. They recommended that minimum wage be the same amount for everyone, regardless of age, so that young people are afforded the same pay as older people doing the same job. Housing benefits need to better mirror the cost of private rented accommodation. Supported accommodation rents should be funded in a different way so young people can live, study and work in safe accommodation with the level of support they need to thrive and progress.

Youth Homeless Parliament members also felt frustrated that there is a lack of incentive for disadvantaged workers on minimum wage to work more than a few hours as they would lose money from Universal Credit. Instead, young people wanted to see the system changed so they are able and encouraged to work but without being penalised and worse off for doing so.

There were also concerns about young homeless people who were EU citizens but with settled status in the country, and the guidance being offered to them in a post-Brexit era.

A woman with glasses and a winter hat stands in front of a brick wall. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The text 'TOPIC SIX' is in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Below it, 'POST-INDEPENDENCE' and 'SUPPORT' are in a smaller, white, spaced-out sans-serif font.

TOPIC SIX
POST-INDEPENDENCE
SUPPORT

Once young people regained the stability required to live independent lives, there was a feeling that there was a lack of support to ensure they continued to thrive. There were concerns around the financial cost of young people able to live independently, both through saving for a deposit for accommodation, through to support and information on tenant's rights once young people have moved into accommodation. For some young people they were also concerned about the lack of support for young parents and their babies, which could potentially be very isolating for young mothers in particular.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homeless Parliament members recommended supported accommodation work with tenants to find a way to create a stepping stone between supported and independent living, such as ways to fund a deposit. Ongoing, floating support for six months after moving into independent accommodation would help young people's transition run more smoothly, and allow any problems to be picked up and tackled before they became larger issues. Young people also suggested that support groups for young people in similar situations may be helpful, particularly for young parents to prevent isolation.

Youth Homeless Parliament members also suggested welcome packs in social housing to inform young people of their rights and local amenities would be helpful.

OUR ASK



The Youth Homeless Parliament members welcome the opportunity to share their lived experience of being homeless with the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing and her encouragement to share more widely with Members of Parliament.

We ask that our experiences are taken into account and used to help shape government policy so that young people who find themselves at risk of homelessness are prevented from being so, and those who experience homelessness are able to access good quality services that will allow them to move on to lead independent lives.

The Youth Homeless Parliament would also welcome the opportunity to work with the government to reduce youth homelessness and consult on standards mentioned in this report.

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**St
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Works with young people

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