



YOUTH
VOICE
SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

2022
YOUTH
HOMELESS
PARLIAMENT

EDDIE HUGHES MP

FOREWORD

Youth Voice is a unique organisation promoting a collective of young voices who have all felt the life-altering grasp of homelessness. Every person involved has been through something that nobody chooses to experience and have come out of the other side wanting to support others. I personally found it humbling to hear the powerful and stirring testimonies from all the representatives at the 2022 Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP).

As the Minister for Rough Sleeping and Housing, ending rough sleeping and ensuring that people have a roof over their head is what I am here to do. So, it's invaluable to hear first-hand from the people who really understand the complexity of the issues at play.

These events provide crucial insights, not only into the experience young people have had with homelessness but also in the new ideas for how we stop other people from becoming homeless.

I would like to personally thank every single person at this year's event for their bravery, their wisdom, and their willingness to change the status quo. The work of the Youth Homelessness Parliament will continue to help improve the lives of young people that face or have faced homelessness.

The moral imperative couldn't be stronger. Evidence tells us that we are making progress and we are heading in the right direction.

Thanks to the collaboration between government, local councils, housing associations and homelessness charities like St Basils, we have seen a 49% decrease in rough sleeping since 2017. But as every person involved in YHP will testify, there is further to go.

This year's YHP focussed on the impact of Covid-19 on young people, and how the virus increased an already heavy load. We worked tirelessly

through the pandemic to put a roof over people's heads and protect them from the virus, wherever possible. It's incumbent on all of us to learn lessons from the pandemic and apply them to how we do things going forward.

This report and its recommendations rightly highlight a number of areas where our offer of support needs work.

We've heard that clarion call loud and clear in government, and recently committed to increase funding for life-changing initiatives like Supporting Families by an extra £165 million. This will serve vulnerable families with the intensive support they need from the early years and throughout their lives.

The report calls for a radical review of children's social care. We agree, and so that's exactly why we commissioned a bold and broad review to improve the lives of England's most vulnerable children and their families by creating proper, lasting change. I look forward to seeing the review's final recommendations.

Among the most important observations – and the most fundamental in my opinion – is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for young people experiencing homelessness. Everyone deserves the support that is right for them; support which considers matters such as race, gender, sexuality, or disability.

This report will make another important contribution to our efforts. Since 2013, Youth Voice have challenged, encouraged, and enabled government to better support young people. You have given a voice to those without one, and for that I thank you.

CHAIRS WELCOME

JEAN TEMPLETON

This is our second year of holding a virtual Parliament and Youth Homeless Parliament (YHP) Members were very pleased to welcome Eddie Hughes, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Rough Sleeping and Housing. Youth Homeless Parliament took place on 29th March 2022.

This year YHP Members were keen to celebrate the 10 years of Youth Homeless Parliament initiated by the late Jack Dromey MP in 2012 and confirmed as an annual event by then Minister for Housing Mark Prisk MP in 2013. Youth Homeless Parliament is both unique and invaluable because it confers equity and status to YHP members and enables their voices to be heard and their experience valued at the heart of government. Based on group reflection and learning, with a mutual purpose of making things better, it is one of the few mechanisms to bring this perspective to policies, programmes and data-led evidence.

Successive Ministers with responsibility for housing and tackling homelessness have valued the unique perspective that young people with lived experience of homelessness bring to their policy and funding deliberations.

YHP Members have used multiple media to consult young people with lived experience of homelessness from around the country, about their experiences during the past 2 years of Covid, paying particular attention to the experience of young women, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with disabilities, young people who are Black, Asian or from minority ethnic communities, young people from vulnerable families and young people with care experience. Their feedback and recommendations are summarised in this report.

We would like to thank the Minister, the civil servants who have supported this work, and our partner organisations who have enabled their young people to participate. Most of all I would like to thank the young people who have given so much of their time, their experience, their compassion and commitment to prevent the homelessness of others. You are amazing!

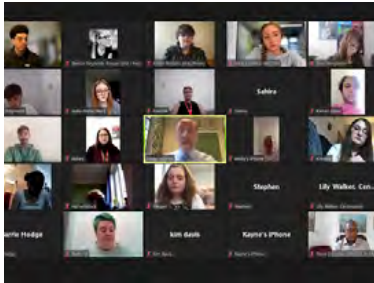
As always, we ask that the experience of young people is listened to, valued and that it influences change for the better.



HISTORY OF YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT

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 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (previously called the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government) following a successful first 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, involves a wide range of agencies and young people across England. It 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.



INTRODUCTION



2022's Youth Homeless Parliament presents an ideal opportunity to focus on several topics, including the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on young people experiencing homelessness, but also to continue the work from the previous Parliament, deep diving into the experiences of young people.

Youth Homeless Parliament members took part in four discussions, one focusing on the Covid-19 pandemic, and three other conversations looking into lived experiences of specific groups of young people experiencing homelessness. These three topics can be understood as: how early intervention was missed amongst young people from 'troubled families'; the experiences of care leavers; and equality and inclusion amongst homeless young people.

In this report we look at the overview of the conversations and identify shared experiences by young people experiencing homelessness that fall within those categories. Many of the recommendations from the conversations, particularly around empowering young people to be part of decisions, are replicated and we have chosen to bring these recommendations together at the end.



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**IN THIS REPORT WE LOOK
AT THE OVERVIEW OF THE
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COVID-19

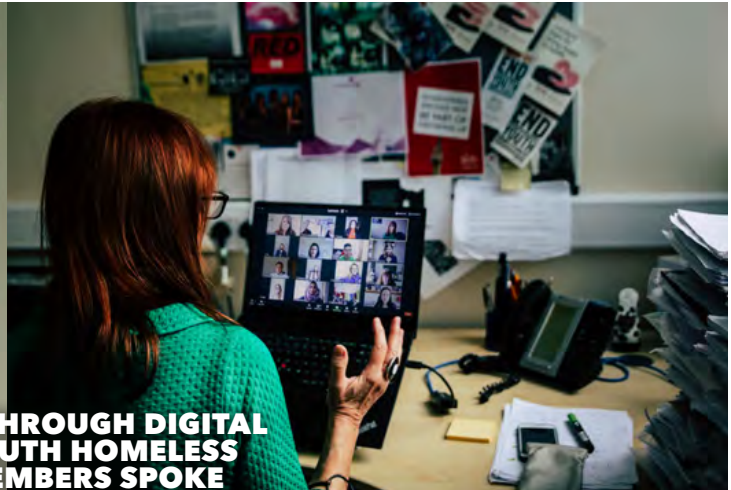


Whilst the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the last physical meeting of the Youth Homeless Parliament, understanding its impact would not take place until a year later. A full report, entitled **'Young People In'**, was commissioned by the then Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government - now called the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This was a substantial report that focused on the impact of the first national lockdown during 2020 on young people who were homeless and came in as a result of the Government's 'Everyone In' program across the West Midlands. However, with subsequent local lockdowns and a second national lockdown, Youth Homeless Parliament members were asked to think about their worries and concerns of the pandemic and the future.

Taking place through digital platforms, Youth Homeless Parliament members spoke about their concerns around getting access to the right information, particularly in an era of 'fake news' and misinformation. Members also spoke about how the pandemic would worsen existing issues for young people experiencing homelessness, with job losses and future job insecurities, increases in bills and food poverty, particularly with stigma around young people accessing food banks. The increase in mental health problems as a result of significant periods of isolation during formative years, particularly for those young people without family or support networks, loss of social skills and increasing difficulty accessing counselling and therapy were also issues that were often mentioned.



[Click here to see the 'Young People In' report](#)



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'TROUBLED FAMILIES'- MISSED EARLY INTERVENTION



Young people who grew up in households identified as 'troubled families' spoke about how there were a catalogue of missed opportunities, even before they became homeless, where early intervention could have made an enormous difference. These young people spoke about how early warning signs of problems were often missed or, if they were noticed, agencies who should have helped did not do so.

Some young people had better experiences but found that, despite the involvement of social services, they were only concerned once the danger was 'immediate', mediation was suggested but never arranged, or interventions did not result in any meaningful or useful resolutions. This left young people living in these 'troubled families' feeling neglected once again; first by their families and second by the authorities, leaving them to feel left behind and discarded by the system.

The impact of poor mental health, worsened by a chaotic home-life, was something that young people in 'troubled families' said was often left unresolved. Outbursts and reactions because of grueling family circumstances were often the focus and the blame placed on the young person, rather than exploring why they were behaving like this in the first place. Young people spoke about a lack of compassion amongst social workers and support staff and a failure to engage with the needs of the individual young person and listen to them and their family.



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CARE LEAVERS



The conversation amongst Youth Homeless Parliament members who were also care leavers looked at what problems they had faced and how this might be prevented by other young people exiting the care system.

Young care leavers felt there was a lack of communication, where young people are told what to do rather than being empowered and informed of their rights. This was compounded by placements that young people felt were not best suited to them, particularly around differing culture and family dynamics which led to conflict.

Without a named professional to support them, young people often felt unsupported and suspicious of support workers who, they felt, made judgements based on their files rather than speaking to the young people themselves.

The lack of support given to help with day-to-day living left young people feeling powerless and having to rely and depend on others. This was made worse when there was no housing offer or plan for after they left care and resulted in them going into homeless services. Rather than feel like a step forward into adulthood, this made care leavers feel like they were taking a step backwards.



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EQUALITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION



The final discussion explored the challenges by young people who were LGBTQ+, female, disabled, Black, Asian, or minority ethnic, or a combination of these characteristics. Whilst each group had their own individual challenges, there were similar issues around feelings of isolation, and a lack of understanding. Rather than take the time to listen and understand, young people felt staff shied away from difficult conversations around ethnicity, culture, gender, sexuality or disability. This had a negative impact on young people's mental health, which young people felt they already lacked sufficient support for.

LGBTQ+

For a lot of young people who experienced homelessness and identified as LGBTQ+, there was a feeling and fear of being judged and rejected for their sexual orientation or gender identity, which had a massive impact on their mental health.

There are also problems for young people who were comfortable in their LGBTQ+ status but concerned that some of the housing options were in areas and amongst communities who are not accepting of people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. But for other young people, having to 'come out' again in an unfamiliar environment to strangers risked retraumatizing them, with some young people choosing instead to hide this side of themselves.

Women

Young women who experienced homelessness spoke around fear of sexual violence. This was a constant worry and not only present during times when they had nowhere to sleep and were on the streets, but that older women experiencing homelessness had cautioned them about their safety in homeless shelters.

Young women who were pregnant or single parents had added issues in accessing appropriate services, especially healthcare and accommodation, whilst juggling the demands of motherhood and effects of pregnancy.

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

Young people felt that sometimes there was a lack of understanding from their own communities and also staff at supported housing projects, which led to them feeling unsafe, abandoned, afraid, and alone. A lack of cultural understanding also meant that proper attention was not always paid to placing young people from different religious backgrounds in the same shared accommodation, which sometimes led to problems.

Disabled

For young people who are disabled, the problem of inappropriate housing was often amplified further. Housing often did not meet their needs, particularly in terms of mobility requirements, or was further away and incurred added costs because of inaccessible transport, putting more of a financial burden on those young people.



KEY THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Across all the discussions as part of the 2022 Youth Homeless Parliament there were several recurring issues and subsequent solutions to overcome these barriers.

Education was a key area, where better training for staff on understanding experiences that differ from their own would allow them to understand young people better and have more compassion. This was particularly mentioned by young people who came from different religious or cultural backgrounds or are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Youth Homeless Parliament members also felt that schools and colleges should also look to better understand what life is like for young people in the care system and the impact this can have on their lives.

They also felt that if schools were better able to spot the early warning signs of potential homelessness, then they may be able to work with other organisations to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place. This need to improve early interventions is something that could make a real difference, by making sure families experiencing problems have prompt

access to talking therapies, counselling and family therapy. Young people felt approaches that centered on wellbeing, such as respite care to give young people and their families a break, would have a real impact in de-escalate tensions and allow families to work through issues. But it was important to listen to the young people and their families as to what approaches would work for their individual circumstances.

Youth Homeless Parliament members did not feel that it was just institutions like schools and youth services that needed better educating. By teaching young people about LGBTQ+ identities, and around subjects on managing conflict, they would have more resilience and understanding of themselves. Young people needed to be taught what good mental wellbeing looks like, what signs to look out for if they were worried about their own mental health, but also what typical family dynamics and healthy relationships look like. This would allow them to ask for help if situations were not right. By picking up issues earlier, young people felt that there might be time to resolve situations before they led to homelessness.

Where young people do find themselves homeless, an approach where there is proper consideration given to the young person's needs and not a one size fits all method would lead to better outcomes. Proper partnership working, with the young person's best interests at the heart of those decisions, would provide better outcomes and allow them to feel cared for in situations where their families may not be able to do so.

Care leavers felt that there needed to be a radical review of the care system that increased opportunities for young people to have their voices heard – both within the strategic decision-making process of the care system, but also when deciding pathways for themselves. Young people felt that having a proper plan in place for where young people exiting the care system will go would not only give them something to focus on, it would also stop them needing to access youth homelessness organisations.

The barrier young people mentioned most often was the lack of communication. Youth Homeless Parliament members felt that listening to young people, giving them a voice and a say in what happens to them, is key to ensuring they go on to lead successful lives and feel empowered to do so. The need to ensure these messages are delivered with young people in mind, by communicating in areas where young people will see them (e.g., social media), and communicating with them in the way

they want to be spoken to, is vital to ensuring that messages are seen and understood.

Covid also highlighted several issues, particularly around mental health, but also around some of the less obvious factors relating to poor mental health. With lockdowns and a significant amount of day-to-day life moving online, young people who were already struggling were further disadvantaged. Digital poverty meant that many young people who were experiencing homelessness did not have access to personal equipment, which risked seeing them fall further behind in education or experience more isolation as they were not able to interact online with their friends and support networks.

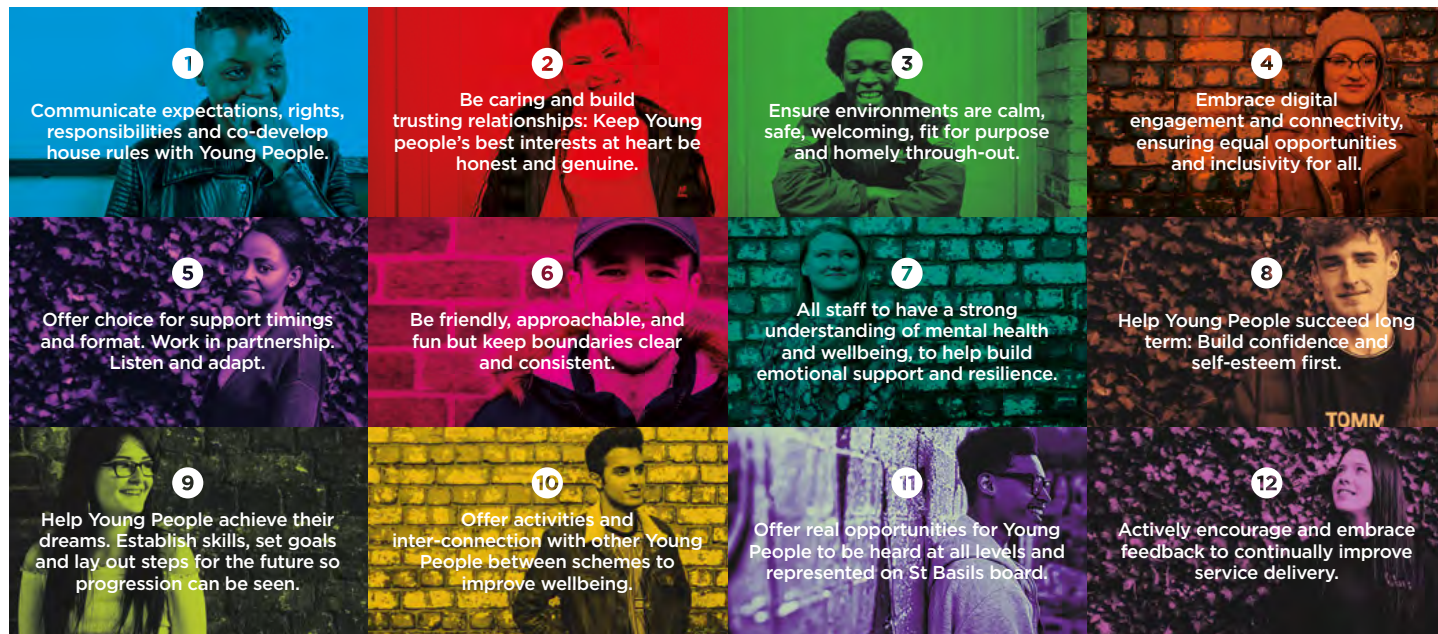
There was also a feeling that food banks posed a bigger problem for young people who felt embarrassed accessing them. This stigma needs to be erased, and food banks need to be easier to access for young people who need them, both by being able to get to them but also by placing them in locations that feel less stigmatising and conspicuous. Innovative approaches to food poverty, like community kitchens or 'pay as you feel' shops, would reduce the stigma and disempowerment young people felt accessing these needs.

Co-designed Standards

One way to put young people's experiences and needs at the heart of decision making is through the development of standards that are co-designed with young people. This puts them at the heart of decisions made about them, by focusing around listening to them on what works, what can improve,

and what young people value. The following are an example of standards developed by young people and adopted by St Basils to ensure an inclusive environment where young people feel accepted and involved in their community.

The 12 Youth Standards are:



THE VALUE OF YOUTH VOICE

For ten years, Youth Voice and the Youth Homeless Parliament has had the privilege of helping young people experiencing homelessness share their lived experiences with politicians in Westminster, which has helped shape government policy. It has allowed young people experiencing homelessness, who are often some of the most marginalised people in society, to feel valued and empowered by their future aspirations and the future of others like them. By working with the government to put young people's voices in front of decision-makers, Youth Homeless Parliament members over the years hope that they have been able to make a real difference.

OUR ASK

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 Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (previously called the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government) following a successful first event involving the St Basils National Youth Reference Group and ministers in 2012.

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We ask that there is a continuing means to ensure that the experience of young people is listened to, valued and that it influences change for the better.

 **Funded by
UK Government**

**YOUTH HOMELESS PARLIAMENT
FACILITATED BY**

**YOUTH
VOICE**
SPEAK UP FOR CHANGE

**St
Basils**
Works with young people

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