

‘Young People’s Views of good practice’ - Positive Experiences

This document has been compiled by Alasdair Stewart of Stirling University from interviews with young people gathered during field work as part of his PhD, due to be completed by the end of 2012.

The research project explores the experiences of young people (aged 16 – 24), who have previously been homeless or in care, when they have moved into their own permanent tenancy. Although there exists statistics that this age group are at a higher risk of leaving their tenancy within the first year the reasons why are not fully known. In order to explore this question the research project involves interviewing young people who are in their own tenancy. By getting an insight into their opinions and experience on how they find living in their own tenancy it should help improve understandings of the challenges they face and if they are overcome. Additionally, by contacting each person three times over a year it is hoped to keep contact with those who leave their tenancy to get their opinion of why they left.

For more information regarding this research, please contact Alasdair Stewart.

While obviously with participants having been recruited once they had their own tenancy meant that they had all been accepted as homeless, the majority did not report any issues in being accepted, although one participant was annoyed that despite having lived independently from his family for a few years before making a homeless presentation the housing officer still insisted on phoning his mother to confirm this. Furthermore none reported having their homelessness status removed before moving into permanent accommodation although there was one case where a participant's brother lost his homeless status by temporarily returning to the family home.

As well as being where young people presented as homeless, the housing office was also the place which found young people their temporary accommodation. In the majority of cases this was done on the same day, and in fewer cases the next, as the homelessness presentation was made. For one participant where no space was available in temporary accommodation on the day the local authority paid for him to stay in a hotel until a space was available.

While for a few there was a long wait on the day to make their presentation, all made them on the same day as they initially approached the council. In majority of situations the temporary accommodation also provided the floating support once the person was in the tenancy. In situations where the organisation did not own the temporary accommodation properties the same organisation provided support both during temporary accommodation and once in permanent accommodation. Two participants entered their tenancy without any on-going support being provided.

Both, however, received non-floating support, the first, from an organisation providing a drop-in service and, the second, from a housing association he was working for. Another received floating support from an organisation whose primary role was not to offer such support after having been forced to leave the main support organisation's temporary accommodation within the local authority. A final received floating support from a drugs support organisation who also provided help with his housing.

Help from Support Organisations

Budgeting

The most common form of help that support organisations gave young people was with budgeting. There are two reasons for this. One is that it is provided by support within temporary accommodation and floating support within permanent accommodation in situations where either the same or different organisation provides support in each situation. The other reason is that there is an on-going change to what expenses young people have from leaving the family home, in temporary accommodation and finally into permanent accommodation. Despite this many young people in permanent accommodation were confident in their budgeting abilities developed when in temporary accommodation as providing them with a basis on which to budget in their own tenancy. Advice was given though on managing use Community Care Grants most effectively in getting what was needed for the tenancy (more on CCG in general below).

Budgeting support predominantly took the form of budget sheets. These were used to go over income and outgoings with young people receiving support in order to highlight areas where spending could be changed.

emm like that how to like no get debt and stuff and how to manage your money like every week if you get it every second week and just the wee things that just for you that naebody like like everybody's got different things like how much you keep and stuff with your money. P.

In a small number of cases budget sheet type support was taken to a further level where a shopping receipt or similar would be gone over to determine where it would be possible to make savings. This matched in intention an aim of another form of budgeting support - assisted shopping. Again, like going over shopping receipts, it was only a small number of participants who received this but those who did spoke positively about it. It was seen by one participant as encouraging him to purchase lower priced goods in order to help him realise that there was not much, if any, difference between them and the more expensive ones he would have chosen for himself. The other aspect that assisted shopping helped with was for those who were unsure or did not know which cleaning products to buy for in their tenancy.

yeah oo they were trying to get you to budget that part or some part or other they did cooking sessions and everything with us just they were really good getting us ready and getting us into our own houses. P.

[...]

they done shopping trips so you know where to find all the deals and everything they done absolutely everything P.

[...]

yeah helped me a lot to understand what I should buy instead of - I was always a person that bought dearer things cause I wanted a fabulous life you know but you know yeah they taught me to buy cheapies. P.

Budgeting support can then be seen as aiding young people in gaining a sense of what money they have to spend to establish a spending route that made ends meet between payments and additionally help in refining spending on specific items to help money go further.

Applying for Benefits and Grants

For the majority of participants the first time they applied for Jobseekers' Allowance and Housing Benefit was after leaving the family home and becoming homeless. Support organisations for most then played a role in helping them fill in benefits claims; particularly by hostel support staff upon entering. Not all benefits applications, however, go to plan. For those 16-17 who are only entitled to Jobseekers' Allowance under "exceptional circumstances" there are cases where they have been turned down. Application of the "exceptional circumstances" clause does not seem to be uniformly applied. In one local authority area, for example, the young person being only 17 at the time the legislation was interpreted as being that the person was to be placed on Income Support instead of Jobseekers' Allowance. For other young people their claim was accepted with no issue. For the rest though, all participants being in same situation of having been recognised as homeless, this did not happen and a Jobseekers Allowance claim was rejected. In such scenarios this leaves the young person not only without an income but additionally with the inability to apply for Housing Benefit to pay for their temporary accommodation. Support workers where this happened were crucial to having the rejection reversed or a new claim accepted. Young people who experienced this were not sure on why when a supporter worker aided them it helped in getting their claim accepted but felt it may have to do with the level of experience support workers have in dealing with such situations.

*one of the folk from the [support service] that was a good cause she went on the phone and she made sure I got a and just like that was probably the best thing they've ever done *laughs*. P.*

[...]

So do you think there was any reason why they listened to her? I.

Nut just obviously like she's dunno she knows what she's talking about I suppose. P.

and why does knowing what shes talking about- I.

She's done it plenty o times on the phone things like that helping folk out I suppose P

Getting Furnishings

The form for a Community Care Grant is 38 pages though some pages contain information about applying and pending on circumstances not every section needs to be filled in. It encompasses questions on benefits and income, if the person has come out of prison, any health problems, loan payments, any other person staying with them and landlord details amongst other things. In terms of furnishings claimants are required to write in the specific items they are needing, estimated cost including delivery and fitting, who will use it, measurements for curtains and carpets and what room(s) they are for, if it's to replace something what is wrong with the current item, if item has special features then what they are and why they are needed, and if the item is for the first time then why it is needed and how has the person been managing without it. Many young people then felt that the form was overly complex and that if they had not received help in filling it out they would not have received as much or even manage to do it on their own. One participant commented that they would not even have thought of all the things that the support worker listed in the end. Support workers having experience in filling out the forms build knowledge of what items to request alongside estimates of costs and the sort of text to accompany each item.

At times not as much as hoped for was received and in such cases it is possible to make an appeal within 28 days. For those who opted to appeal support workers again helped in filling out the forms and in all cases where a person opted to do so they received a higher amount. However, those helping with recruitment of participants mentioned that not all appeals were successful, something that the participants were themselves aware of.

Support organisations also aided young people in spending what they received in Community Care Grants. This involved either taking them to shops or going through catalogues with them. Community Care Grants did not cover paying for all the items for a person's home and in some cases the person wanted additional items to help personalise their tenancy, something strongly connected to promoting settlement and them feeling that they could call their tenancy their home. In such cases support organisations contacted charity organisations who provide freely or sell on loan additional furnishings - the latter of which are also used for places to spend money

received through Community Care Grants. In a small number of cases the support worker also got extra furnishings for young people via their own social networks such as if a friend was replacing an item in their own place. Finally, support organisations in some situations also helped transport both previously owned furnishings when moving into the tenancy as well as those bought once in their tenancy.

And they only gave me I think it was about £220 out of it so I was like oh what am I gonna do. [...] But after that [my support worker] brought me up the freezer, 'cause one of his friends obviously got rid of a freezer, he thought [I] will have that for his house, so he pulled up and he dropped it off and he goes, you know, freezer for you. And also though, erm, the dryer, that was from [my support worker] P.

Fabpad¹ also provide a unique service where young people not only got help in getting more furnishings for their tenancy but also personalised such furnishings or created them themselves. One participant for example got an old chest of drawers that he sanded down and repainted to match the rest of the room. Weekly drop-ins are provided in order to do this, with materials and guidance in creating items provided as well as service users aided in creating a plan for decorating their tenancy. Such items included ornaments, mirrors, cushions and curtains.

They tables were a gift, they tables were from Fab Pad [...] That was made [pointing to a decorative ornament] in Fab Pad so that cost nothing. P.

Help With Gate-Keeping

A participant got help from his support workers to help him in getting his friend, who he considered as a sister, to leave.

I had my sister stay with me and that was just hell but that was hell i had to get her kicked out my house i couldn't live with that any more really we had fights all the time smashed thin- the house was a mess didn't look like a house looked more like a bin a skip but she left last year after getting kicked out and its been fine since. P.

so did you come to the situation of just saying you have to leave? I.

I couldn't cause I'm too much of a walkover in that sort of line I can't if she went to me I'm not leaving I'd be o. P.

so who did you get to help you? I.

I got my support worker [...] they told her she was sleeping on the couch when they came in and made up this sort of lie that my mum told them that she was

¹ Fab Pad (<http://www.impactarts.co.uk>) is an Interior Design programme. for 16-34 yr olds and provides a chance for young people in their first tenancy or at risk of homelessness to personalise their home and make it their own.

staying with me and they want them out cause it was still their tenancy until my case closed with them so it was my tenancy but because they got they made up this stupid little white lie that it was their tenancy as well so they grabbed all her clothes and drove her over to the [homelessness] centre. P.

Positives of Independent Living

Although upon entering a tenancy some young people felt lonely, scared or had doubts about their ability to maintain their tenancy at the point of interview these had subsided.

I think it's got a lot...my opinion is it's got a lot more relaxed, I don't feel quite as alone now 'cause my relationship with mum is getting a lot better, and my other family as well, it's kind of all coming together a bit more, so it's like I can focus more on how it feels in a positive way, rather than negative. P.

As the above quote illustrates feeling settled and at home is not merely a process of time but is dependent upon other changes within their life. For many others furnishings, personalisation and safety all contributed towards a sense of home.

*what makes a home? ... erm, it's got to be yours you've got to feel comfortable in your space and loo- you've got to be able to be able to come into your house and go *huh* this is so me like this is how you like it it's not like you've no other choice but put it this way put it that way you know what I mean *sigh* what makes a home ... erm, to feel safe in it to feel comfortable to feel safe and to be able to have it and do it yourself I think thats what makes a home. P.*

As another participant phrased its -

when you walk in and it's just normal but you've got your ane wee things like sitting about and your ane like lamps and ornaments and your rug just everything pulls it together to just make it your home. P.

The latter half of the quote in saying "everything pulls it together" shows the emphasis on fully furnishing a tenancy with it not necessarily being this or that item that makes a home but the result of all these things together. This highlights the importance for support in getting furnishings and help in personalising to help people settle into their tenancies. Not only do these things contribute towards a sense of home and more positive views but it also was, for one participant at least, helped distance himself from the identity of having been homeless. Additionally again drawing on the importance of having fully furnished his tenancy at being important compared to this or that item.

You come see my house it's so much it's if you saw it when I just had my couch and everythin and you see it now you wouldn't think I was ever homeless. P.

Others also highlighted having their own space as a positive factor, particularly in the case of the next quote where the participant felt she was no longer in need of support and ready to manage things herself.

ee it was just I kent what it was going to be like before I moved into it so I kent what it was I was expecting just like my ane space like just freedom basically from adults. P.

Another also highlight own space as a positive factor in having their own tenancy, focusing on the difference of it compared to a negative experience of supported accommodation.

Aye its good it's good to have your ane space and that like its different a I suppose different from being in the [supported accommodation] and that completely about a million times better just wish I'd been put in here before I had been put anywhere like that. P.

The stress that that can be experienced in temporary accommodation led to one participant to give up work -

That's when I was in the homeless and that and it was just a bit it was getting a bit stressful tryin tae get a job and get hame and cook I wasn't getting a good night's sleep or nothing either a so that was basically that just all the things goin on in my life then. P.

- and for others the amount of wage lost in rent while in temporary accommodation also lead to giving up work or a lessening of its desirability. Moving into a permanent tenancy and achieving the furnishing and decorating to make it feel "when you walk in and it's just normal" then remove these barriers to work.

Improved relationship with family

For a number of the young people it was having left home when they improved relationships with their family. This is not surprising given that family breakdown and arguments were the predominant reason for leaving home. It was not solely leaving home in most cases that led to improved relationships but time, changes in their life and a sense of increased maturity - the latter feelings of which in some cases were tied to the ability to live independent. In the case of one participant there had been a slow improvement in relations to re-establish their relationship proper when she became pregnant.

since I left in the first place oo terrible I never spoke to my mum for about like I never spoke to my mum at a' for about five months then kind o back and forth kind of talk she maybe bring me some messages down or something but nothing really wouldnae talk or nothin and then we started talking a bit mare and that probably for about a good four months we were quite talking before I

feel pregnant but like just no properly but since I fell pregnant back to being mother and daughter. P

Another participant left home as a mutual decision between him and his mother after a family friend played them off each other and taking advantage of the participant's vulnerability to make him think he could not trust her. When asked if he felt his relationship with his mother had improved because of him leaving from this mutual decision he started by saying it had improved before he left to then add on reflection

it has got better actually because me and mum didn't really have that bond before anyway, because we were quite distant from each other, whereas I think maybe we appreciate each other more, so I think that lesson and that experience has helped us learn, not just me, erm, my mum said that actually, that it's helped us appreciate each other more basically. P.

With a participant who had left home after repeated arguments with his mum while in temporary accommodation he re-established contact.

we had a fall out and it was about, I dunno, three or four weeks while it was rare to speak to each other, but after that, you know, I went out to the house and we apologised to each other, we got everything sorted out and they asked me do I want to move back it, and I was like. I said 'No, I'll think about it' but I was kinda thinking in my brain, you know, I'm finding my feet now, you know I'm getting to the age where I'm getting older, more mature and I want to see if I want to give life on my own a bash and it's worked out really well for me. P.

Over time in his own tenancy the relationship with his mother, and other family members, continued to improve.

I mean me and my mum are really close now, so me my mum, my dad and my two brothers come round more often. Normally we was all constant fighting with my brothers obviously brothers and sisters are always fighting, but now they always, they come round really often, you know. If I need money, you know, they throw money at me, if I need help, because they both drive, if I want something taken out of my house or taken to my house they'll get over with their cars and help me. P.

For this participant and others family relationships were important in providing a source of help financially and with furnishing their tenancy.

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