

## SUBMISSION FROM SHELTER SCOTLAND

Last year over 19,000 young people aged between 16 and 24 made homelessness applications in Scotland. Over 3,000 of these applications were made by someone under the age of 18<sup>1</sup>. A safe, secure home is crucial for everyone's wellbeing but every year in Scotland tens of thousands of young people are living in unsuitable accommodation or in a state of uncertainty because of homelessness or the risk of homelessness. Addressing poor quality housing and homelessness are key components in eradicating child poverty and for ensuring that vulnerable young people do not get trapped in a cycle of housing crises and repeat homelessness.

### **Reason for homelessness**

The most common reason for homelessness among young people is relationship breakdown, typically with parents or step-parents. For many this is a consequence of long-term conflict within the home and often involving violence.<sup>2</sup>

Half of young homeless people were living with their parents or family before becoming homeless - this rises to 69 per cent for those aged 16-17.<sup>3</sup> In 2010-11, 40 per cent of young people, aged 16-24 became homeless because they were asked to leave their accommodation, 27 per cent were asked to leave due to a household dispute or relationship breakdown, with 31 per cent of these disputes being violent or aggressive.<sup>4</sup>

*'Too many young kids are running away from problems at home. There should be more to help them deal with it.'*<sup>5</sup>

Homelessness refers to anyone who does not have a home; you do not have to be sleeping on the street to be homeless. A homeless young person might be sleeping at a friend's house, staying in a temporary bed and breakfast hostel or living in overcrowded or unsuitable housing. Homelessness figures only refer to those people who have been accepted as homeless by a local authority, but in reality there are many other people who do not know there is help available or are too afraid or don't want to ask for help. When young people find themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness they are particularly vulnerable, from the risks associated with sleeping rough to violence and other dangers.

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<sup>1</sup> Homelessness Statistics Annual Reference Tables Scottish Government (2011)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss1011>

<sup>2</sup> JRF (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

<sup>3</sup> Homelessness Statistics Annual Reference Tables Scottish Government (2011)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss1011>

<sup>4</sup> Homelessness Statistics Annual Reference Tables Scottish Government (2011)  
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/hmlss1011>

<sup>5</sup> All quotes in this briefing are from young people surveyed as part of the report *Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?*

*'I was too stressed out as my Gran died when I was in care which made me worse and it went on to offending, fighting, taking drugs and drinking alcohol from 9 years old.'*

Homelessness compounds a number of the problems faced by young people. This is particularly evident with mental health problems and/or the onset of (or exacerbation of existing) substance misuse problems. There is particularly strong evidence that homelessness impedes young people's participation in employment, education or training<sup>6</sup> which in turn can impact significantly on all areas of a young person's life and wellbeing.

There tends to be a view that the majority of homeless young people are men when in fact if you consider homeless young people who have children then most households are headed up by a woman. More than half (56 per cent) of young homeless households are headed by a woman. This is illustrated in figure 1 which also shows that most homeless young people are single (66 per cent), 21 per cent are lone parents and 5 per cent are young couples with children.

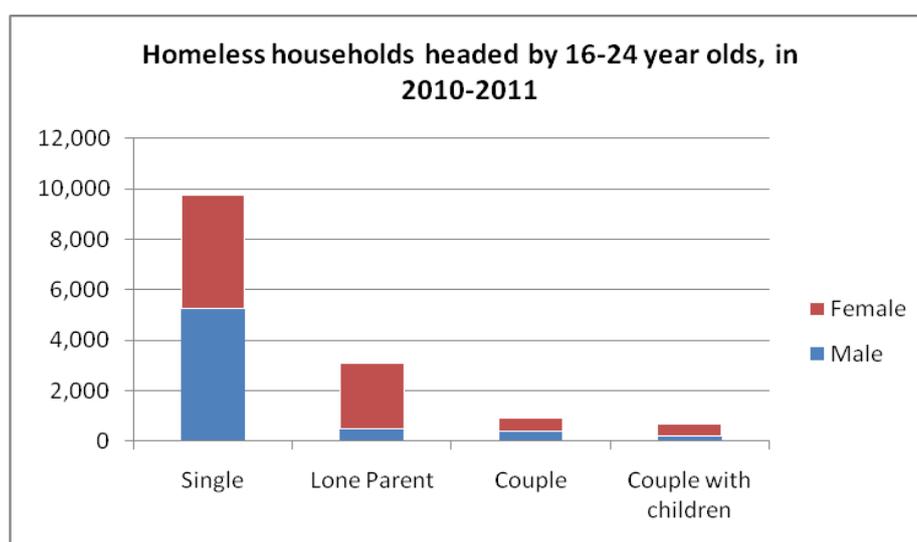


Figure 1

## Young runaways and homelessness

Shelter Scotland recently conducted research into the links between young runaways and later instances of youth homelessness<sup>7</sup>. This research showed clearly that young people who run away before they are 16 are consistently identified as being at high risk of homelessness and having housing problems in later life. The findings highlight that the vast majority of young homeless people (84 per cent) had also run away overnight from home or care when they were under 16.<sup>8</sup> Many had run away more than once, and as part of this

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2008) *Youth and homelessness in the UK*

<sup>7</sup> Research report: *Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?* (April 2011)

[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/348013/Running\\_away\\_and\\_future\\_homelessness\\_FINAL.pdf](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/348013/Running_away_and_future_homelessness_FINAL.pdf)

experience they had often slept rough and sometimes stayed away from home for more than four weeks. This research suggests that any focus on preventing homelessness needs to tackle the issues faced by young runaways and put resources into early intervention for those under the age of 16.

### **Young people leaving care and homelessness**

Despite efforts to reform the system for children and young people in care or leaving care, there are estimates that a third of homeless people were formerly in care.<sup>9</sup> Of those young people eligible for aftercare services in Scotland on 31 July 2010, 14 percent (538 young people) had experienced one or more episodes of homelessness.<sup>10</sup> On this date, 135 of the young people were staying in homeless accommodation. This is likely to be an under estimate since 35 per cent of young people who were eligible for an after care service were not, for various reasons, receiving this service.

In 2010/11 over 2,500 homelessness applications (5 per cent) were made by people leaving care, hospital or prison. Although not all of these will be young people, many of them will be, and regardless of the age, better through-care and support should be in place to ensure people do not immediately fall into housing crisis when leaving care or other institutions.

### **What needs to happen**

While the causes and consequences of youth homelessness are often complex, there are a number of preventative measures that can be taken to try and identify young people at risk of homelessness or to help those who are facing a housing crisis avoid repeat homelessness. Although there has been a small reduction in the numbers of young people who are homeless in the past year, there is still more that can and should be done to ensure that the right help, support and interventions are available to help young people avoid homelessness.

### **Housing Support**

A key part of homelessness prevention is housing support to help people sustain their tenancies. Social landlords should be offering pre-tenancy and ongoing housing support to all tenants but specifically young people at the start of any tenancy to ensure they know their rights and can manage their responsibilities. This could be anything from basic budgeting and money management advice, through to more complex support delivered through a number of agencies. A duty for social landlords to provide support to those homeless people who need it was passed as part of the Housing (Scotland) Act 2010 nearly 18 months ago.

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<sup>9</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2008) *Couldn't Care Less: A policy report from the Children in Care Working Group*, September.

<sup>10</sup> Scottish Government (2011) *Statistics Publication Notice: Health and Care Series: Children Looked After Statistics 2009-10, CLAS2009-10 - Additional Tables*, 23 February.

- This legislation must be commenced as soon as possible with accompanying guidance to ensure that the support needs of homeless applicants are met to help to avoid cycles of failed tenancies and repeat homelessness.

### **More good quality affordable housing**

To allow young people and families with children to thrive, more high quality housing in areas where they want to live, needs to be built. There are currently more than 3,500 households with children in temporary accommodation waiting for a settled home.

- Improved quality of temporary accommodation should be prioritised by embedding minimum standards for all temporary accommodation as set out in Shelter Scotland & CIH Scotland's *Guidance on Standards for Temporary Accommodation*<sup>11</sup>.

### **Early intervention/prevention**

The best way to help people to avoid the stress and damage caused by homelessness is by preventing it in the first place. Early interventions to tackle homelessness should begin with working with children and families. Shelter Scotland has received funding for the Safe & Sound project based in Tayside, which was developed in response to evidence that family breakdown is a key trigger for youth homelessness – children who have run away from home before they are 16 are much more likely to be homeless as young adults. The new approach we are taking with Safe & Sound is therefore threefold: mediation between young people and their families to manage and resolve conflict; support in setting up home independently for those people who are unable to return to the family following mediation; and work to strengthen the whole family to avoid a recurrence of the same issues with younger siblings.

### **Partnership working**

Although local authorities have legislative duties to certain groups including care leavers, children under the age of 16 and unintentionally homeless applicants (and others), councils must continue to work in partnership with other statutory bodies, voluntary organisations and other social landlords to try and prevent homelessness wherever possible and to respond effectively when it does happen. This means ensuring that housing services are joined up with education, health, social work and employment services to ensure young people get the advice and support they need to move on from housing crisis.

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<sup>11</sup> Guidance on Standards for Temporary Accommodation (Jan 2011)  
[http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_library/policy\\_library\\_folder/temporary\\_accommodation\\_guidance](http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_library/policy_library_folder/temporary_accommodation_guidance)

## **Listen to young people**

The opinions of young people should be considered in this inquiry and this committee should seek to speak to young people to find out about their experiences of running away, homelessness and living in unsuitable housing to see what could have helped them to avoid housing crisis.

*'When you run away from home it is usually for a good reason – your parents and you don't get along, you're having problems with feeling left out or being abused by someone and you don't feel as if you can tell anyone about it. When the police turn up looking for you, you feel really guilty and sometimes they give you a lecture when sometimes that's what you have ran away from.'*

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