

## SUBMISSION FROM YPEOPLE

Ypeople is a Scottish charity, which provides housing, education and training support to people affected by homelessness across the central belt of Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to provide evidence in response to this very relevant and necessary inquiry.

Ypeople, formerly YMCA Glasgow, was founded in 1824 in order to meet the growing need for safe, affordable accommodation for the hundreds of young men coming into Glasgow for work.

Nowadays Ypeople provides a range of services across the central belt of Scotland for children and young people, families and also single adults. For young people affected by homelessness we provide accommodation, outreach and resettlement support. Our supported accommodation in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Falkirk and South Lanarkshire is provided in comfortable self-contained shared flats and bedsits. Each resident has a key worker, his or her own plan for independence and the support to make the necessary changes in their lives. Social and educational group programmes run alongside individual work.

Ypeople is unique in pioneering residents' associations for tenants in supported accommodation. Young people in our Seaforth House service in Falkirk set up the first such award-winning association in Scotland, which is now in its 4<sup>th</sup> Year.

In all our services, we ensure that young people have a voice to influence not only decisions about their own lives, but also about how the service is run and developed. We believe that this is an important aspect of preparing for citizenship and independence and is crucial to the provision of a relevant and responsive service. We would be very pleased to arrange for young people who have been given the opportunity to inform and develop our services to give evidence to the EOC enquiry.

Young people from Seaforth House recently were supported by SpiritAid, a charity set up by David Hayman the film and theatre actor, to make a film 'Speakout' which encourages young people to have the courage to talk about problems. We are grateful to Siobhan McMahon MSP and a member of the EOC for hosting a reception on 6 March 2012 in Committee Room 2, which will be attended by the young people and by David Hayman, and to which we look forward to welcoming committee members.

### **Factors that lead to homelessness in young people**

There are a number of factors which have led to 35% of all homeless applications being made by young people under 24 years of age. Some of these are economic and some the result of housing policy.

## **Economic**

There is a presumed dependency of 16-18/24 year olds but they have no legal entitlement to parental support beyond the age of 16 years. There is also no entitlement to benefits for 16 – 18 year olds who are not in full time education. However parents who are themselves reliant on benefits are not able to claim for these young people as there is a presumed capacity to work. Therefore they are treated as dependents, but often have no-one to depend upon.

Where young people are entitled to claim benefits – if they have been abandoned or rejected by their parents, are orphans, or if they themselves have dependent children - the benefit that they can claim is set at a lower level than for adults, whatever the actual circumstances of the young person.

Most young people over 19 years who are in full time further education or who are in higher education are not entitled to income support or housing benefit, regardless of whether they have families to support them. This prevents already disadvantaged young people from pursuing education and training.

## **Housing shortage**

There is a shortage of affordable housing in all sectors, including in social rented housing. The introduction of right to buy legislation in 1979 had a substantial impact on the profile of Scottish housing. Over the years, nearly half a million public sector properties have been sold in Scotland under the Right to Buy scheme. Recent years have seen a rise in social house new builds, but at nowhere near matching the stock that has been lost. Most recently the economic crisis has led to a sharp fall off in private sector new builds. This housing shortage affects young people as it leads to overcrowding and to tensions within families. Priority is given to homeless applicants to access those properties that do become available, as councils are not allowed to house people into overcrowding situations. Therefore larger families with three or more children can remain stuck in two and three bedroom accommodation with no hope of rehousing.

Overcrowding causes huge tensions, particularly in families with teenage or young adult children. These tensions are exacerbated by youth unemployment. However young people in college or in work are also adversely affected.

## **Social/emotional circumstances**

Young people need strong family support during turbulent teenage years. Many families who struggle financially are not able to provide this support consistently. It is just at this point when the education, health, and benefits system backs off from supporting families to support their young people.

For the most difficult years, there are the least services and support available to parents and families.

In some families, alcohol abuse and violence by parents can cause home life to be intolerable and unsafe for some young people, and they will chose to leave home at very early ages of 16 and 17 years.

## **Looked after young people.**

While young people who have been looked after are entitled to be accommodated by the council, in practice the accommodation and support that they are offered is often the same minimal financial and accommodation as that offered to homeless young people. Without proper support, they do not manage to sustain tenancies, college or work placements, manage budgets, or manage relationships.

## **Perverse and unintended consequences**

If homelessness is the only route to obtaining social rented housing, this provides a perverse incentive to have to be declared homeless in order to become eligible for housing. This puts a strain on the homeless accommodation supply, brings young people into contact with older people who may have a range of serious problems, and removes them from familiar neighbourhoods and positive family and community supports.

Young people with dependent children can access housing and benefits which other young people cannot. While these rights are necessary and should not be taken away, this creates a perverse incentive to very early parenthood in order to secure housing and benefits, or even continuation of education.

## **What we need more of**

- Mediation to help families work out their difficulties and prevent unplanned breakdown
- Financial support for low income families to provide for dependent young people
- Planned routes into suitable accommodation for young people without them having to 'go homeless' for months in order to be eligible
- A much greater supply of supported accommodation for young people to act as a 'half way house' between family and independence

- Greater financial support for young people to complete training and education. This would mean less tension in the family home, lower numbers of young people having to leave home as a result, and also increase educational attainment, and the number of young people with vocational qualifications.

## **Some stories from Ypeople about young people affected by homelessness**

### **Prevention is cheaper than homelessness**

The economic, social and personal cost of these young people becoming homeless is much greater than the cost of preventive services and support would have been when it was first needed. Names and locations have been changed in order to protect confidentiality.

#### **Ruth's story**

Ruth was 15 when her single-parent mother died. Her older sister took her to live with her family of four in their three-bedroom house. Her sister and her husband were told that the only support they could claim was guardian's allowance of £14.75 per week in addition to basic child benefit of £13.20p.w. This put strain on the family finances. Extras such as cinema trips, dancing classes, family outings, including an annual family holiday all became difficult. There was resentment about this and Ruth heard a lot of grumbles from her brother in law, and from her 12 year old niece who had to share her room. By the time Ruth left school, tensions and arguments had become too much. Social services refused to help, saying it was a family matter and not a child protection concern. When Ruth was 16, she was left at home alone while the rest of the family went on holiday. She had a party. Result – house wrecked relationships at rock bottom. Ruth's sister packed her bags and took her to the social work department, who sent her to the homeless service, who provided emergency bed and breakfast accommodation, and referred her to Ypeople.

When she came to Ypeople's Branston Court service in Maryhill we supported her to get back into college and helped her to plan for a future – and to mend some fences with her sister. However, regardless of actual circumstances, Ruth will be regarded as partially dependent on adult support for living expenses. If she works to support herself she will not be entitled to the adult minimum wage, but will have to pay the same rent and other expenses as an adult. If she can't find work, she will have to live on the lower rate young person's benefits which assume dependency on family. Working or not, housing benefit will be unlikely to cover her full rent.

#### **Jamie's story**

Jamie is the youngest of three children and the only boy. His father left when he was 12 and started a new family. His mother had to have treatment for cancer and after this she became frightened to leave the house, so when Jamie started getting into trouble at school she did not respond to letters. He was excluded from school and

was around the house all day, and then out at nights, returning drunk in the early hours. His older sister had left home to live with her boyfriend, but when she became pregnant, she moved back home. She and the baby took Jamie's room. Jamie had to sleep on the couch. Tension flared when he wanted to sleep late and his family wanted the living room. He walked out and began couch-surfing with friends. When his friends' mums got fed up, he spent a few nights sleeping rough, before being rescued by the council's outreach homeless team and from there came to Ypeople Seaforth House in Falkirk. Jamie is now beyond the school leaving, age, but has missed two vital years of education. Because no-one picked up that Jamie's behaviour at school was a direct consequence of problems at home, instead of help, Jamie was excluded from school and this led inevitably to the breakdown of family relations, and then homelessness.

### **Jennifer's story**

Jennifer was a straight A student till her mother remarried. Her new stepfather began to show a lot of the wrong kind of interest in Jennifer and nothing she could say or do would stop him cuddling her, touching her, watching her. Her mother blamed Jennifer for her husband's behaviour, saying that she should just stay out of his way. Jennifer stayed in her room as much as she could, but when she had to put a chair against the door to keep him out at night, she decided it was time to leave. She stayed with a friend, whose parents were sympathetic, but she had no money for food, or bus fares to college. The social work department said that as she was over 16 years she could not be referred to a children's hearing. They advised her to go to the housing department to declare herself homeless to get help. At first, this meant a room in a city hostel that was noisy and frightening. Even though she had a lock on her door, she felt just as unsafe as she had at home.

Jennifer came to Ypeople's Broomhouse supported accommodation service in Edinburgh, where she managed to finish college and attain some highers. But at age 19, she is unable to go on to university as she had planned, as there is no housing benefit or income support for students and her mother and stepfather refuse to support her despite having a reasonable income.

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