

Past Present Future



Young people in Bradford speak out on homelessness



Introduction

A total of 1.3 million children in the UK today live in severe poverty – more than one in every ten children. These children have an income well below the government’s poverty line and lack basic necessities that are taken for granted by most people in the UK today, such as proper meals, warm clothes in winter and properly fitting shoes.

Homeless or vulnerably housed children and young people¹ are highly likely to be experiencing severe income poverty, and also lack the security of a home. They are likely to be experiencing difficulties in a range of areas in their lives, such as access to education, domestic violence, substance misuse and poor health.²

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is clear in society’s obligations to children and young people. Children and young people have the right to

- **Privacy (Article 16)**
- **Protection from being hurt, violence, abuse and neglect (Article 19)**
- **The best health possible and to medical care (Article 24)**
- **A good enough standard of living to allow them to develop properly (Article 27)**
- **Education (Articles 28 and 29)**
- **A say in decisions that affect them (Article 12)**

Children and young people who are homeless and vulnerably housed risk having all of these rights violated. We need to listen to what they have to say and take action.

It is difficult to know how many children and young people are homeless or vulnerably housed in Bradford. Estimates vary between 500 and 6000. There is provision in the city for 500 units for vulnerably housed young people but we also know that this provision is inadequate and that young people we have spoken to have been turned away – leaving them no option but to sleep rough. We also know that much homelessness is “hidden”; people may not be included in the figures because they are on the streets, not accessing any mainstream provision, “sofa surfing” or staying in squats.³

This report highlights the findings of a series of consultation events⁴ aimed at hearing about the experiences of those young people. The report captures

¹ For definitions of homelessness, including legal definitions see www.shelter.org.uk

² For information on the links between child poverty and homelessness and the End Child Poverty Campaign see http://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/end_child_poverty

³ <http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/be-informed>

⁴ The consultation sessions were held in hostels during Summer 08. We spoke to approximately 30 young people aged 16-25 and aimed to capture their experiences in order to inform development work for Save the Children.

- Young people's identified needs and issues
- Young people's proposed solutions
- Actions and next steps

The report also includes an appendix showing session plans used in the consultations.

Issues raised by young people

Overarching issues

An overarching concern of young people we spoke to was that of equality. Young people felt that they were disrespected because of their age and that they were not a priority for housing or for society in general. Some young people felt doubly discriminated against, both because of their age and because of their history,

“I feel judged coz I've been in prison”

And expressed powerfully by another young person

“It's an unfair world. Burn down the world and rebuild it”

This statement seems to capture both the sense of injustice felt by young people, but also a sense of disempowerment. There was also a recurring theme of personal safety; Young people had concerns about their general safety, and this concern was compounded by a general mistrust of adults, including the police.



Graffiti board

Young people's issues: debt, crime, dole, education family housing

Housing

Unsurprisingly the topic young people were most vocal about was housing. They spoke generally about a lack of housing options, and there was a perception that there is insufficient housing for young people in Bradford.

“Housing options not available to the homeless”

They also said that there was no coordination of places in hostels, so they spent a lot of time ringing round looking for somewhere to stay. They often needed to find accommodation immediately, and found that there were waiting lists, or that services could not provide immediate solutions.

Young people had had a range of negative experiences which had caused them to lose their homes, including domestic violence, poverty, substance misuse and family breakdown. At this crisis point many had found themselves without anywhere to go.

“(It was) Unfair that as a young person I couldn't access a bed. A professional got me a bed after I slept rough for five weeks. “

“Nowhere to go if you are on a tag”

“People say ring back tomorrow”

“Really hard to get emergency accommodation”

“Getting locked up was a housing option for me”

As a result of having nowhere to go the majority of the young people we spoke to had spent time sleeping rough. The consequences of sleeping rough for these young people were profound, and they felt that it was getting worse.

“I slept rough for 3 nights, well I didn’t actually sleep, up all night and it affects your health, you feel paranoid”

“I had to shoplift to live when I was sleeping rough”

“Cleanliness is hard when you sleep rough”

Rough sleeping is the most extreme example of a housing crisis. But young people had much to say about other experiences of being poorly housed. Relating to hostels they said that hostels were often of a poor standard, that they had concerns about safety and that they lacked stability

“I want to be normal. You don’t feel normal in a hostel, no stability”

“I get scared of druggies in hostel”

“Always danger of becoming homeless again”

“Stayed in hostel for 2 years, but didn’t feel safe, problems outside the hostel”

They also commented that there was a stigma attached to sleeping in hostels and that there was a lack of provision for couples. Cost was also a barrier for some people and they easily got into debt with hostels when there were problems with access to benefits, especially when undertaking temporary work. They were however keen to stress the helpfulness of some staff in hostels.

Young people had explored other options and alternatives such as Nightstop⁵ or sleeping with friends, but these options were also unstable, and did not provide the security that many of the young people were looking for.

“I’d like to get my own place – good area, safe no burglaries”

Health

Mental health issues were a recurring theme throughout our conversations with the young people. For example, they talked about being “down” “paranoid” and “depressed”. Many said they felt that they were getting nowhere and that problems built up, leading them to feel anxious and depressed. One young woman talked about self harming and said that it was hard for her to get out of bed in the morning. She said that it was difficult to get help for her self harm.

⁵ Bradford Nightstop offers free emergency accommodation to homeless young people aged 16 to 25 in the homes of trained volunteers, on a one night at a time basis. For more information visit www.bradfordnightstop.org.uk

Also key were young people's views on health and wellbeing regarding eating and exercise, they said that healthy food was too expensive, at hostels kitchen equipment is provided, but food is still expensive

“Come and take a photo of the inside of my fridge. It's empty”

Access to sport and leisure facilities were also seen as expensive. They highlighted that it was particularly difficult for girls to access sports facilities and keep fit.

Services

A common theme from the young people was that there was insufficient provision of support and advice services. They highlighted a need for services which provided emotional support. However, the young people had much to say about the sorts of services they were accessing, and this highlights the need for services to consult regularly with its users.

The subject of access to services brought about much discussion. Young people said that they needed services to be all over Bradford, rather than just in one area, and if this was not possible, support with transport costs would help them access. They also highlighted that services needed to be available “out of hours” and not just between 9 and 5.

Some of the barriers young people talked about were less tangible than location and opening hours. They talked about being stereotyped and that this put them off accessing. They also commented on there being poor links between services which means that they have to repeat their histories over and over again, this can often be harrowing for young people as the reasons they have left home are often complex and difficult.

“I need one worker I have to keep telling my story over and over again, there should be one worker communicating for us”

Services themselves often seem complex to young people, and they find them difficult to navigate, they don't always understand where to go for help. They also said that they didn't always understand the rules that services operated and that these rules can seem petty.

From the point of view of young people services need to be very flexible, have empathetic staff and to listen to their views. They also suggested that peer mentoring would be a way of helping a range of young people access.

Education

“It's much harder for homeless people to keep in the system, we keep dropping out”

“It's well hard to get into colleges”

“I'm dropping out of education, life too hard and I can't afford to go to college”

Young people had mixed experiences and views on education. Some were keen to stay on and get an education and realised that this would be key to their future. They noted that their opportunities would disappear if they dropped out of school and that it would make it harder for them to get decent employment. They did, however, identify barriers to doing this. They were concerned that it is difficult to “get into schools” because their situation meant that they did not fall into a neat catchment area. They also felt that they needed targeted support from teachers to help them stay on track with work, but this was not available.

Cost is a key barrier. Education is expensive and young people identified that there were costs to accessing education, including books and transport.⁶ They identified that the education maintenance allowance does not actually help young people living independently – in the example of the young people we spoke with it had actually made them worse off as they had had to pay increased rent based on their income as a result of this benefit. As such the key grant that is intended to support young people to access education does not help some of those most in need. Young people did not want to get into debt because of their education.

Money

“Money is the biggest problem”

“I live on £25 a week, with £10 bus fare”

“It’s not about budgeting, there just isn’t enough money”

“I want to work...but then my rent would go up”

A key message from the young people that we spoke with is that they simply do not have enough money to live on. If they were on benefits these were insufficient to keep them in a good standard of living. Similarly though, young people felt that work does not pay, as when they get work the rent at hostels goes up accordingly. Another key theme was that of debt, young people found it very difficult to avoid debt as there are often delays in receiving their benefits. Debt is a source of anxiety to the young people we spoke to and they feel under great pressure.

Young people frequently commented on the cost of living being very high, and that more could be done to help this. They suggested that benefits could be increased, but also some services such as transport and sports provision could be cheaper or free. They spoke of the high rent in supported housing and hostels, and that this could be reduced, for those working, to incentivise young homeless people to move into and sustain employment. They also suggested that some of the rent they paid when working should be used/set aside to help them/people save for deposits for moving on, providing long term savings. Again this would serve as an incentive to encourage young people to move towards financial independence rather than relying on state benefits.

⁶ For more information on the costs of schooling and the campaign to make the school day free see <http://www.cpag.org.uk/2skint4school/index.htm>

Money was an area in which they felt inequality was at its most profound; they said that the world was so unequal and that politicians and “fatcats” should do more to even things out.

Family and Support

“When I fell out with my family I felt very low”

“I was told I could live in Keighley, but I would have hated it, all my connections are in Bradford”

Young people who are homeless or vulnerably housed often have limited social networks. They often leave home because of violence and conflict – but are then also moved away from sources of support. It can be difficult to hold down relationships when housed in temporary accommodation and this can lead to further isolation.

The young people we spoke to were keen for there to be flexibility in where they are housed and also for support with conflict resolution

“Foyer has helped me get into a position where I’m back in touch with my Mum”



Colourful consultation

Young people share their experiences through the characters of Jack and Jess

Solutions proposed by young people

Young people had a series of solutions and suggestions for improvements to the services they receive that they felt would make positive impacts on their lives

General

- More housing provision targeted at young people with complex needs, including emotional support needs
- Targeted support from staff providing health and education services to improve retention



Graffiti board

Young people have much to say about their future, and what they hope it will hold

Access to service

- Services could be more flexible in their opening times and should be more widely available
- Free transport to services would help with access
- Info cards about services for young homeless people could be issued generically at school, or in more targeted approach, e.g. train and bus stations, giving details of services
- Develop an “out of hours” service, confidential telephone and an open door drop in
- Enable easy self referral
- Young people need to be able to take more control, to be involved in developing services.
- There should be peer mentoring opportunities

Money

- Increase benefits
- Make work pay, analyse how work (especially temporary work) affects rents payable

- **Free education and travel**
- **Evaluate benefits such as EMA to see if they help people living independently**

Conclusions and next steps

Young people who are homeless or vulnerably housed can experience a range of difficulties in the short term, which can have an enormous impact on their lives both in the immediate and in the long term. These include accessing provision, having sufficient resources for a quality life, gaining an education and having good health. These issues undermine children and young people's rights and therefore we have an obligation to address them.

Young people we spoke to are the authorities on their experiences, young people with experience of homelessness have a unique insight into the system and are able to offer solutions to their problems. Yet many felt that they did not always have a say in decisions that affect them or how services are shaped. Services need to listen and respond and be flexible to the needs of the young people they work with. A key recommendation of the young people we spoke to was that increasing client involvement in service development helps build services which are more relevant and responsive to the needs of vulnerable young people. Plenty of examples of this kind of approach exist, for example St Basil's in Birmingham has a youth advisory board in which young people accessing their provision have a real say over decisions that are taken.⁷ More generic support and toolkits can be sourced from Participation Works⁸.

Finally, while this consultation has been useful in capturing the voices and experiences of young people it is no substitute for robust research. It is imperative that more research is done into the scale of the problem in Bradford so that we can begin to address the needs of some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

⁷ For more information see <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/>.

⁸ www.participationworks.org.uk

Acknowledgements

This consultation work could not have taken place without the support of

BACC

Bradford Foyer

Bradford Speakout

CNET

Keyhouse

Save the Children

Appendix 1

Initial Consultation Session

Aims

- By the end of the session young people who have experienced homelessness will have discussed issues of poverty and homelessness in their past, present and future.
- By the end of the session young people who have experienced homelessness will have chosen a medium for expressing themselves in the next session (for example art/ drama/ music).

Materials

- Food!
- Red and yellow card as prop for groundrules
- Flipchart paper and pens
- Voting boxes
- Shoebox filled with potential memorabilia (e.g. condom, smoking paraphernalia, phone number, friendship bracelet, letter)

Time	Stage	Purpose	Activity
0-10	Introduction	Participants understand purpose and boundaries of session. Session is safe for participants	Introduction Introduce aims of session and facilitators. Groundrules <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elicit ground rules from the young people that think are important and feel that they can stick to, for example "No talking over people"• Write the rules up on flip chart paper and display• Appoint someone in the group as "referee" if they feel that people in the group are breaking the agreed rules they should show red/ yellow card and the group should collectively decide the appropriate "penalty".
10 - 20	Warmer	Set informal tone Encourage participants to move around	The sun shines on <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask the group to sit in a circle (on chairs)• Facilitator stands in the centre of

			<p>the circle and says “the sun shines on...all people who (name a category) for example, wearing trainers, like football.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone who fits into that category should stand up and find another seat. • Carry on until the group is well shuffled. • Start with gentle themes, but if it feels safe can progress to more challenging areas such as “the sun shines on people who have slept rough”
20-40	Activity One PAST Voting Box	<p>Introduce idea of talking about the past...how participants got here today. Reflecting on key moments.</p> <p>Encourage light hearted tone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitator makes a number of (prob 8-10) statements around key moments in childhood (should be reasonably light hearted) e.g. my first day at school was brilliant... or my first cigarette was disgusting) • Participants move around and vote according to whether they agree or disagree. • Participants have chance to discuss after each statement and express opinions • Feedback at the end, participants can share with the group if they choose.
40 – 60	Activity Two PRESENT SHOEBOX	<p>Participants can reflect on their own lives in a non threatening situation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up group in a circle and remind participants of groundrules. • Introduce shoebox “I found this in Darren/ Chantelle’s room ...” • Ask participants to choose an item from the box and discuss it. What does it mean to this person? What kind of life do they have? Why have they kept this?
60-80	BREAK		
80 - 100	ACTIVITY 3 FUTURE WISHBOX	<p>Participants can reflect on the services they receive and what they would wish for</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce themes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- housing and health 2- personal life and relationships 3- life chances i.e. work and opportunities • Ask participants to think about

			what they would want services to look like and to put their ideas in the box
100 - 120	Closer	Assure participants of their valuable contribution and give praise Encourage young people to attend next session and give them chance to choose activity	Circle time - evaluating session. Ask participants to vote for activity in next session.

Appendix 2

Further Consultation Session

Aims

- For young people with experience of homelessness to share their experiences in a safe environment
- For agencies to listen the views of young people on homelessness so that they can develop work appropriately

Materials

- Food
- Staff and materials for music session
- Staff and materials for graffiti session
- Badges – for names and to display photography consent
- Disposable camera for young people to record event
- Personae figures for recording young people’s experiences in a safe way
- Flip chart paper, pens, post it notes

Time	Activity	Notes
0-15	Arrivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome people • Give out badges • Sign consent – including for photographs • Sign into workshops • Music?
15-30	Formal welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plenary, explain focus of the event • Explain all of the activities and format of the event. Introduce Jack and Jess (personae for young people to enable them to relate their experiences in a safe) • Groundrules
30- 60	Open space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce idea • Tables with facilitators and rough outline of Jack and Jess characters. • Each table takes a different issue (to include out of hours, issues identified by young people in previous session and BLANK) • Facilitator supports young people to contribute. • Ideas on post it notes
60 -120	Workshop 1 – Graffiti Workshop 2 – Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One staff member with each to support.
120 – ongoing	Food	
120 – 150	Feedback from open space OPTIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on how many yp still around/ general atmosphere, can bring it together and round up OR leave it and collect info from tables.



Save the Children

We're the world's independent children's charity. We're outraged that millions of children are still denied proper healthcare, food, education and protection. We're working flat out to get every child their rights and we're determined to make further, faster changes. How many? How fast? It's up to you.

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Bradford Speakout

Bradford Speakout is an offshoot of Speakout, a project promoted by Groundswell. The group consists of service users of housing and advice projects, staff from these projects and other community groups. We had been influenced by the work of Groundswell UK and are supportive of their core values that homeless, poor and excluded people:

- are not 'the problem' – they must be part of the solution
- hold the key to solutions in their experiences and knowledge
- have a right to the information they need to make informed choices about their lives
- can build communities Bradford Speakout and create positive change by acting together

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CNET

CNet is the Community Empowerment Network for Bradford and District. We are an independent company operating as a social enterprise – Bradford & District Community Empowerment Network Ltd. The main aim of CNet is to increase the capacity of individuals and voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations to enable them to participate in local decision-making and have influence over policy and service delivery.

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