



KNOW WHERE TO GO?





AN NIYF RESEARCH REPORT

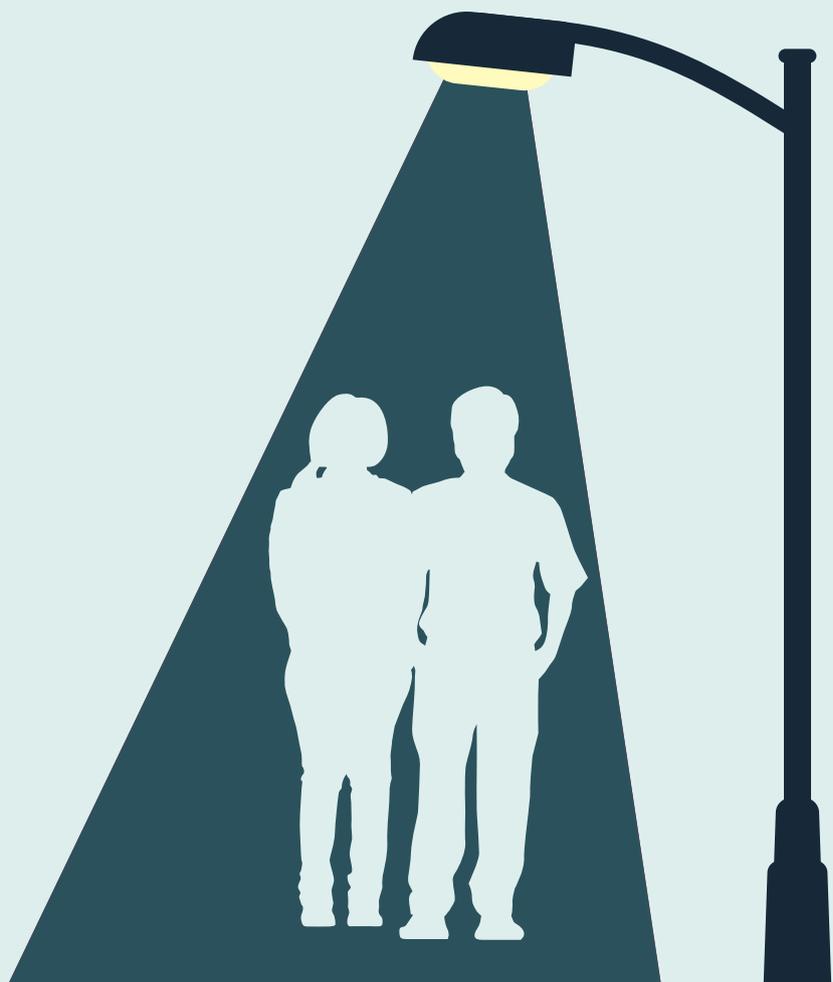
A WORD FROM THE NIYF YOUTH APPRENTICES

This has been an especially useful experience. We have never been involved doing a piece of research like this. A lot of learning came from having this opportunity. From finding out how hard some information is to find, to what organisation/charity offered what, to visiting Manchester and the impact this had on us in terms of how other providers operate, just having the opportunity to do so!

A lot of time has gone into this and with COVID-19 impacting the research massively in terms of getting our group work done face to face. We feel it was handled well and gave us a new understanding of how to overcome challenges and be creative with solutions. Having unlimited support from Amanda and Stephen was class.

There have been some hurdles along the way but more in terms of finding the information out around where to go for help, what did this look like, how was anything accessed. We feel positive about our research and the approach taken and we are excited to share this with you all.

Blair Anderson
Saoirse McEvoy





FOREWORD

This report was created with both the hope and intention that no young person in Northern Ireland facing homelessness would find themselves with 'Knowhere to GO'.

What started out as a 6-month research process became a two-year journey due to the impact of a global pandemic COVID-19. Although this slowed the process down, we were quickly able to adapt and overcome, resulting in the publication of this research report.

Youth homelessness in NI is systemic and prevailing. The focus of this report is to illuminate the transformative possibility of engaging with, listening to and learning from young people. It is hoped that it may contribute to wider attempts at understanding what is needed from young people's perspective to prevent homelessness. As evidenced throughout the report and key actions, we strongly believe that this is possible but only with sufficient support. Unfortunately, however, many young people still do not have access to the support services they need.

Without the assistance and collaboration of several youth organisations this research would not have been possible. We want to give special acknowledgement to; Include Youth Give and Take Project in Derry/Londonderry, Action for Children staff in Omagh and Enniskillen and our own colleagues Heidi Johnston and Clodagh Cooke working with young people in Ards and North Down and Ballymena. We have strived to ensure that the report itself is an authentic reflection of all the young people who were brave enough to share their experiences and insights with us. Thank you for trusting us.

We would like to express our gratitude to The National Lottery Community Fund, Department for Communities NI and Housing Executive whose financial support and commitment to the overall Change Project has undoubtedly helped us transform the lives of young people. Also, our steering group who have overseen the project notably Richard Tanswell, (Housing Executive) Maureen Kerr, (Housing Executive) Dierdre Coyle, (Health and Social Care Board) and Janet Hunter (Housing Rights). Thank you for your dedication and direction.

Finally, to our expert researcher Stephen McGarry who witnessed the best and worst of us; our tears, tantrums and frustrations, you didn't waver in your wisdom and encouragement even at draft version 99! Also, to David Toner who sprinkled his design magic over the final version. Thank you both for your thoughtful attention to detail.

It is our hope that whoever you are as a reader you will be inspired to take action to help ensure that we continue the battle to prevent youth homelessness in N.I.

AMANDA STEWART
NIYF PARTICIPATION DEVELOPMENT WORKER



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was produced by the Northern Ireland Youth Forum Change Project. The Change Project emerged out of collaboration between the NI Housing Executive (Homelessness Strategy and Policy Unit and Community Involvement and Social Cohesion Team) and the NI Youth Forum (NIYF) via their Relentless Change Project, which is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and seeks to build the capacity of young people, aged 16-25 who have experienced homelessness or have been in care.

In 2018, young people from NIYF produced a film documenting their journeys into homelessness and made a number of recommendations for policy makers highlighting several areas that they felt could be improved, including:

ONE

The development of an advice service for youth homelessness that would be flexible and provide out-of-hours support and adapting a peer approach

(i.e. led by young people who have experienced homelessness)

TWO

The need for more education in schools and youth clubs about homelessness.

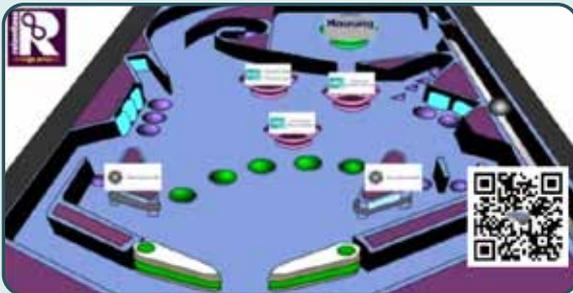


Figure 1: Pinball Video

As a result of viewing the video the NIHE Homelessness Policy Unit engaged with NIYF to establish the 'Change Project'. The central aim of this project is to directly prevent homelessness occurring by providing peer-to-peer advice and assistance to young people in care experiencing difficulties at home or are in some other way threatened with or experiencing homelessness.

In October 2019 NIYF employed two Youth Apprentices whose core function is to engage and support young people at risk of homelessness in a mentoring process that helps them to navigate housing rights and services. Both apprentices have previous experience of homelessness and draw on this experience to help other young people. In addition, the apprentices assist NIYF staff in working with young people to improve their quality of lives within their community by promoting housing options, independent living skills, healthy life choices and training & employability options.



YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The challenge of youth homelessness in NI is a persistent one with data showing how numbers of young people experiencing homelessness is the increase.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the UK going into lockdown in March 2020, the UK was already facing a considerable housing and homelessness crisis. In the decade leading up to 2020, all recorded forms of homelessness had a sharp increase.

As a result of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns closing down significant parts of the economy, unemployment has risen across all age groups. However, young people have been particularly badly hit as they often work in the sectors most affected.

Young people are also more commonly affected by 'hidden homelessness', where people do not present themselves as homeless to the housing executive, instead often sofa surfing in friends and/or family's homes.

It is estimated that around **30%** of the between
70,000 AND 112,000 concealed potential
households (hidden homeless) who would want to live independently in NI
ARE UNDER 30
with the scale of the problem reducing greatly within older age groups.



SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND ACTIONS

By engaging directly with young people and through desk and primary research completed by Youth Apprentices, this review identified a series of key insights:

- Stigma of homelessness is concerning
- There is a feeling that there is no support available
- Young people were broadly unaware of what information is available and where to go to try and access information about homelessness
- More can be done to inform young people in order to prevent homelessness
- The cyclical nature of disadvantage and homelessness
- The importance of trusted people¹ in the lives of young people and accessing information
- Low visibility of the issue of homelessness and youth homelessness specifically

¹A trusted person was identified in the research as an adult that a young person feels comfortable sharing information and engaging with such as a youth worker, teacher, parents of a friend etc



ACTIONS

Based on the insights gathered from the considerable research and engagement from the two Youth Apprentices, five key recommended actions are proposed that, if implemented, can vastly improve how young people access information, services and reduce the traumatic experience of homelessness.



1



Develop a single online reference point for young people to access relevant and up to date information.

2



Using a peer led youth work approach to develop and deliver educational workshops on homelessness prevention throughout N.I. Build the capacity of young people who have experienced homelessness to deliver educational workshops in schools and youth settings. This work should be embedded into the curriculum.

3



Provide support and training for trusted people (such as a youth worker, teacher etc.) to ensure access to relevant information.

4



Develop an awareness raising campaign to bring the topic of youth homelessness to the fore, reducing stigma and encouraging difficult conversations.

5



Consider a freephone helpline and signposting service for young people at risk and experiencing homelessness.



THE CHANGE PROJECT

In 2019 a number of young people associated with the Relentless Change Project engaged directly with the NIHE about the issues facing young people who were experiencing homelessness. As part of the project, they produced a video, 'Pinball', documenting their personal experiences of homelessness and highlighted several areas that they felt could be improved.

Two recommendations resonated with the NIHE:

- **The development of an advice service for youth homelessness that was flexible and provided out of hours support and took a peer approach**
- **The need for more education in schools and youth clubs about homelessness.**

Following further consultations between the NIYF and the NIHE an application for funding was made to the Department of Communities (DfC), which proved successful, and the Change project commenced in October 2019, and is due to conclude in 2023.



The central aim of the project is to directly prevent homelessness occurring by providing peer-to-peer advice and assistance to young people in care, experiencing difficulties at home or who are in some other way threatened with homelessness. The project to date has:

- **Become a platform and resource which can be used by statutory agencies to augment their service provision including, frontline Housing Executive Staff, Social Services Staff, Youth Justice, Schools and Colleges as well as youth homelessness service providers;**
- **Through the peer-support element of the programme provided benefits to the peer support workers themselves, increasing levels of self-esteem, confidence and positive feelings through employment and training and development opportunities;**
- **Highlighted issues surrounding homelessness within schools, youth clubs and other outlets appropriate to young people;**
- **Supported Objective One of the Homelessness Strategy² (To prioritise the prevention of homelessness) with direct outcomes for the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities;**
- **Supported the Draft Programme for Government outcome “we care for others and help those in need” which is linked to Departments for Health, Justice and Communities;**
- **Led to greater collaboration between statutory and voluntary sectors.**

² www.nihe.gov.uk/Housing-Help/Homelessness/Homelessness-strategy



YOUTH APPRENTICES



Blair Anderson

Life was challenging, but determination means nothing will hold me back. Growing up in the care system meant I was labelled; the lack of support and guidance did not give me any hope for a bright future.

The struggles faced gave me a passion and I dedicated myself to making a difference, to not give up, to find myself but most importantly to educate myself to support and advocate for those in similar circumstances.

I want to create change, to create a safe environment for those who may find themselves in tough situations, to reinforce the importance of not giving up, while breaking down the barriers giving young people the platform to have their voices heard.

I believe that with the correct support, help and guidance you can overcome any situation in life.

Saoirse McEvoy

My homeless journey started when I was 17 when I was asked to leave my family home which I thought that my world had turned upside down, I lived in Flax Foyer and from there that is when I then became involved with the Northern Ireland Youth Forum.

Coming through the Youth Forum on a Project called Relentless Change Project which changed my life from me doing this group I gained so many skills, qualifications, and friends. From doing this I gained my level 1 in Judo Coaching and went on to teaching Judo in primary schools. Also getting to go to university which I never thought I would go.

I know that the housing system can be complex, and it can be hard to know where to get help. I have recently got a job with NIYF working as a Peer Mentor and I am excited to use my own experiences to help other young people as other young people love hearing peer's success stories because it gives them more hope for themselves.



METHODOLOGY

This research sought to engage with over 40 young people that have experienced homelessness and understand the issues and barriers facing young people at risk of or currently homelessness.

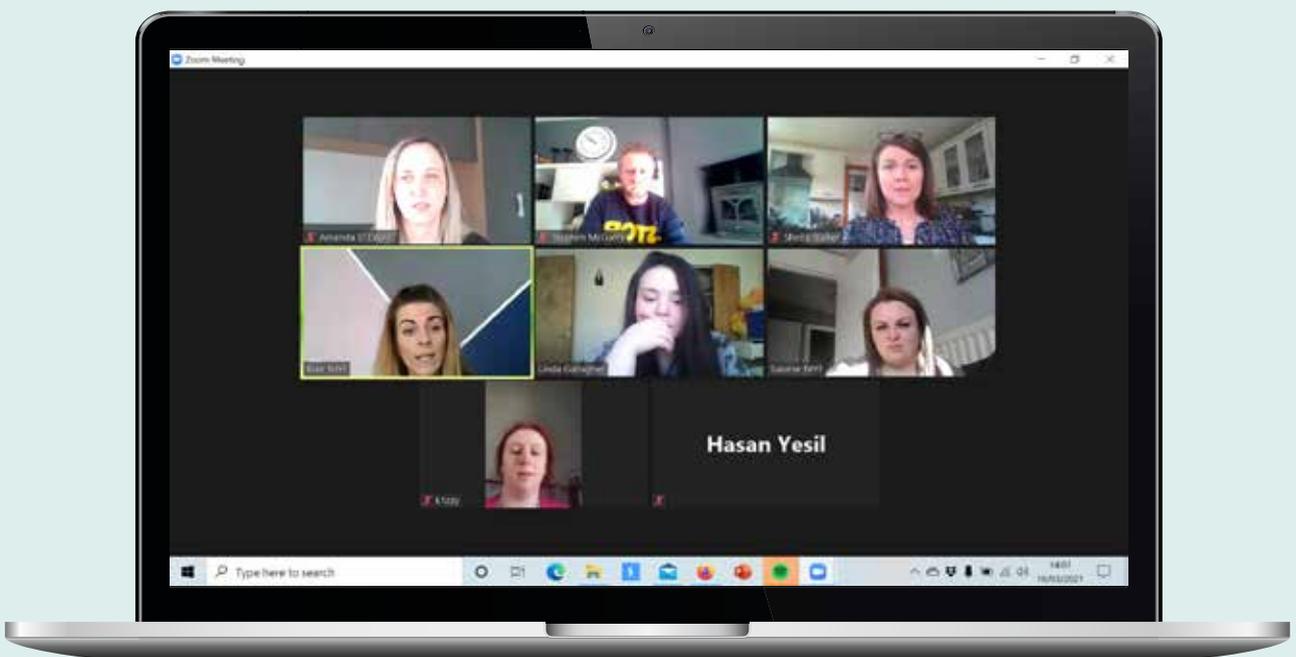
A work plan was agreed between NIHE, Health and Social Care Board, Housing Rights NI and NIYF with a two-stage approach developed to 'scope web presence requirements' that involved:

- **Supporting the Youth Apprentices to undertake desk-based scoping exercise of information available online in relation to homelessness**
- **To design and conduct peer 'focus groups' throughout NI to assess the accessibility, suitability and quality of current information relating to homelessness prevention, including identification of gaps/areas of good practice etc.**

Only one of the planned sessions was completed before social distancing measures were implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In order to gather feedback from the remaining young people, Zoom focus groups were held with young people regionally across NI:

- **Action for Children, Omagh & Fermanagh (In person)**
- **Ards & North Down Borough Youth Council**
- **NIYF Amplify group, Ballymena**
- **NI Housing Executive Youth Forum Group, Belfast**
- **Include Youth 'Give & Take', Derry/Londonderry**

This required a unique approach in engaging partner organisations to support the research using pre-existing groups to participate. Moreover, the Youth Apprentices reconfigured the focus groups to an online format and with the support of the assigned mentor utilised online whiteboards (Mural) to record interactions.





YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

This research has highlighted that it is important to understand that the challenge of youth homelessness is considerable. Recent data continues to demonstrate the ongoing need for support for young people experiencing homelessness. This section identifies some key statistics and relevant strategies that demonstrate the need for further understanding of the issue.

A recent article **on Apr 21 in the Belfast Telegraph**, identified that the tide of Northern Ireland's 'hidden homeless' - young people forced to 'sofa-surf' between homes - has soared inside a year (2020- 2021).



It was revealed that the total placements in hotel and bed and breakfast accommodation was

320 IN 2019 compared to **1,481 IN 2020**

This is an increase of
363%



In 2019/20

11,323 householders were accepted as statutory homeless (from 16,802 presenting) of which 34% were single males and 30% were families.

Within that grouping the number of under 25's that were accepted was just 2,675 or 16% of the total. (2020 Homelessness Bulletin³)

Additional data from Centrepoint⁴ suggests

just 13% of young people presenting as homeless are accepted and received support, across the UK.

Acceptance rates by household type are the lowest for young single males and females (aged between 16-25)

This data demonstrates the need for improved understanding of the specific needs of young people experiencing homelessness within government agencies and support services but is also suggestive of a lack of suitable, specific accommodation and support structures for young people.

This is reflective of the situation across the UK, as evidenced by Centrepoint's 'More than a Number: the scale of youth homelessness' (2018)

Hidden homelessness remains prevalent but is difficult to quantify within published statistics.

However, between **70,000 and 112,000** concealed potential households (Hidden homelessness) who would want to live separately are estimated in NI (Crisis). Whilst not exclusively an issue affecting young people, **data from crisis⁵ identifies that 30% of a sample of hidden homeless were under 30** with the scale of the problem reducing greatly within older age groups.

The most common reason for presenting as homeless by young people is that parents are unwilling to accommodate, for around 38% of presenters, according to the Centrepoint 2018 report. This is consistent with 2020 data from DfC listing the top 4 reasons for homelessness for accepted applicants being – Accommodation not reasonable, Sharing breakdown/family dispute, Loss of rented accommodation and Domestic abuse.

³www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-housing-bulletin-october-december-2020

⁴centrepoint.org.uk/media/2396/more-than-a-number-the-scale-of-youth-homelessness.pdf

⁵www.crisis.org.uk/media/236815/the_hidden_truth_about_homelessness.pdf



Such statistics illustrate that young people in NI that are experiencing homelessness remain at a considerable disadvantage relative to other demographic groups and that youth homelessness continues to persist.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic must also be considered. Centrepoin’s Youth Homelessness Databank⁶ showed that in 2019/20, more than 121,000 young people across the UK sought help because they were homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The need for this work is born of the recent NI Homelessness Strategy developed by the Housing Executive, however it also has a clear strategic fit with the recent Programme for Government Outcomes Delivery Plan and reflects the international guidance from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, as illustrated below:

NI: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Outcome 8:

We care for others and we help those in need

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Article 12: Respect for the views of the child

Article 16: Right to privacy

NI: PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT

Outcome 12:

We give our children and young people the best start in life

998 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Article 8

NI: HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

2017/22

DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 17



THE NI HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY⁷ AIMS TO ACHIEVE FIVE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

ONE

To prioritise the prevention of homelessness.

TWO

To secure sustainable accommodation and appropriate support for homeless households.

THREE

To further understand and address the complexities of chronic homelessness across Northern Ireland.

FOUR

To ensure the right mechanisms are in place to oversee and deliver this strategy.

FIVE

To measure and monitor existing and emerging need to inform the ongoing development of appropriate services.

Using an outcomes-based approach, the strategy aims to make an impact upon the lives of those affected by homelessness through three overarching aims:

- we have support that prevents us from becoming homeless
- we live in suitable homes
- we have the support we require to access and/or sustain a home

The Strategy seeks to ensure that good quality information, 'designed to help households approaching or experiencing homelessness, is available across all partner agencies in a range of formats and accessible to all.'

The extent to which this has indeed been achieved in the case for young people is examined within this research.

⁷ [https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-strategy-northern-ireland-2017-2022.aspx?ext=.](https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Homelessness/homelessness-strategy-northern-ireland-2017-2022.aspx?ext=)



UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Children's rights are set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)⁸ – an international treaty (agreement) which nearly every country in the world has signed up to. The UK Government ratified the UNCRC in 1991 which means it and all areas of government and the state (including local government, schools and health services) must do all they can to uphold these rights. Within the Convention a number of articles enshrine children and young people's rights regarding housing:

- Article 4: Public bodies should use the maximum available resources to ensure that all children have an adequate standard of living.
- Article 12: Respect for the views of the child.
- Article 16: Right to privacy.
- Article 27: The State should ensure that every child has a standard of living which is adequate to allow them to develop fully - physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and socially.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

The methodology proposed sought to gather a mix of qualitative and quantitative data utilising a mix of secondary and primary research methods. This would focus initially on a desk-based review of existing services complemented by a series of focus groups to gather input from young people across NI.

SCOPING EXERCISE

Before embarking on the desk review the Youth Apprentices were supported through a self-reflection exercise to develop a 'cloud of assumptions' that detailed their own understanding of the issue. This was complemented by a 'journey map' that outlined the process and perceived feelings of a young person as they experienced the fear of becoming or being homeless.

JOURNEY MAP

Feelings that a young person will feel when going to the housing executive to tell them that they are homeless include:





When a young person goes to the housing executive they go in and ask for a ticket number or from my own experience you ask to speak to someone and they give you the number to wait until the number has been called (so already you are feeling anxious because you're having to wait while there are sometimes alcoholics, people under the influence of drugs etc.)

When your ticket number has been called you go and speak to an adviser and tell them you have become homeless and that you have nowhere to go and then once you do this the person that is taking your details will go through a 4-stage test that is compulsory to see if they have a duty of care to house you or not. If you are 16-17, they will also have to phone social services.

In addition to their own experiential journeys the Youth Apprentices developed a case study based on the journey map for other young people that have experienced homelessness; their names are Robert, Collette and Kai. These have been intertwined throughout the report providing details of other young people's personal experiences.

WEB SEARCHES

When starting the scoping exercise, the Youth Apprentices found it quite difficult to find the information a young person may need at the right time.



From my experience going online I found that there is so much information out there on all different sites that you're unsure who to ring first or what way to turn. A lot of the organisations I looked at, Simon Community, MACS, BCM, NIHE, Housing Rights to name a few all had similar information but from different points of view or maybe different directions as to where to go first.





As we know, when young people find themselves in need or in a crisis, it is difficult to take in what is being said or understand the information given to you to be read. Between long words, big paragraphs and being in an emergency, you are not going to take everything in. You need information straight to hand that makes the process easier.

Knowing what to type into Google is also another problem I came across; you need to use the right words or even better, one website that everyone can be made aware of/ advertised that has absolutely everything there. If contacting multiple agencies and telling your story repeatedly is not only distressing for the young person but delays the process of potential support. There are a lot of helpful sites, including:



Housing Rights publishes housingadviceNI, a resource that aims to provide reliable independent housing advice and information to the public.



MACS provide a range of services for young people including a dedicated Housing Support service for young people leaving care.



Working with young people aged 16-25 who are homeless, leaving care, or experiencing difficulties in relation to their tenancies.

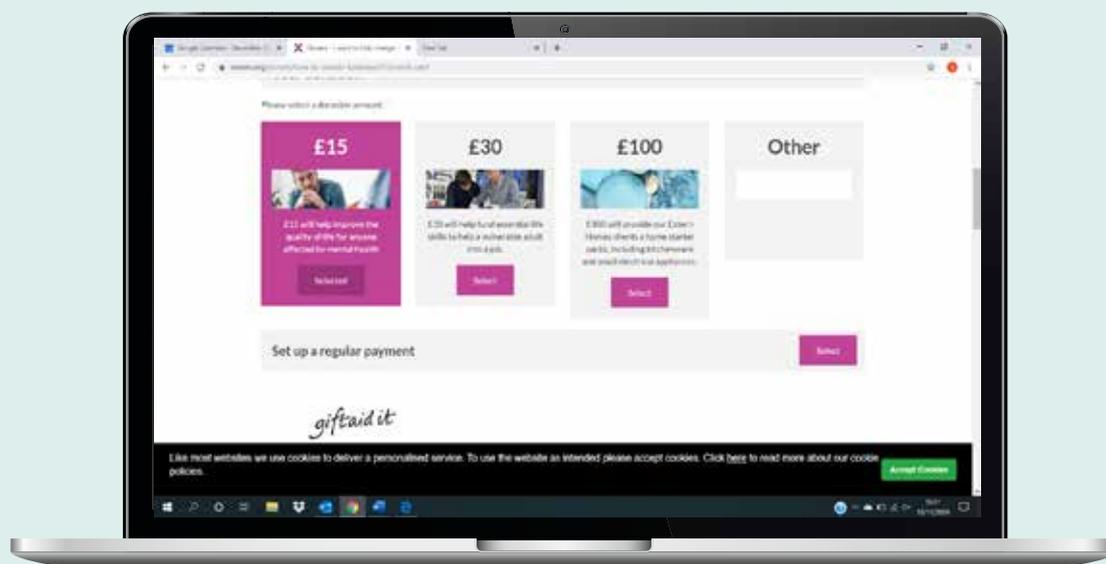


NI's leading homeless charity. Work to support people who are experiencing, or are at risk of homelessness including 9 support services & 25 accommodation projects.

Feedback from the Youth Apprentices suggests that whilst the sites on the previous page were easily found, they all had too much information meaning that a young person may get confused or flustered. It is important to remember that a young person will very rarely use these sites unless they need extra support.

One young person when asked how they felt finding information out online suggested that, when typing into google 'what to do when you become homeless?'

The first thing that comes up is 'helping the homeless' donation page from Extern.



This donation page is for help with mental health, help with essential skills needed for a job and also help with starter packs when moving to permanent accommodation.

Moreover, when typing into Google 'what to do when you become homeless at night' the search returns with services for other countries. If you were to become homeless and you needed somewhere to stay this is clearly not helpful.



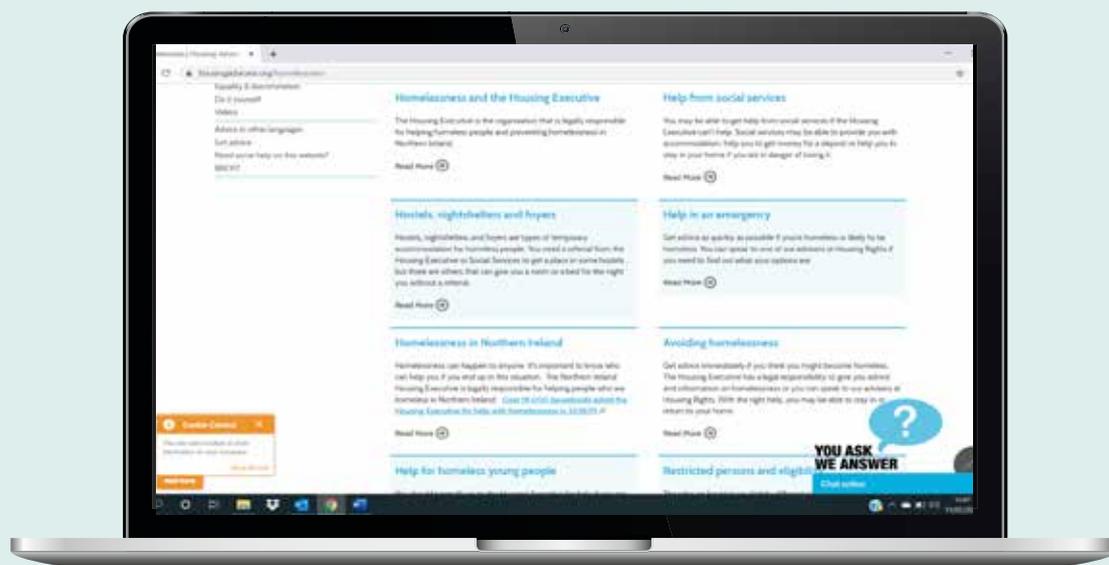
When young people changed the search by adding the words Northern Ireland, the results showed the Housing Advice NI page.

THE MAIN RESULTS FOR THE SEARCH WERE:

- Housing Advice NI
- Housing Advice NI: Help in an emergency
- NI Direct/homelessness
- Citizens Advice (UK)
- Shelter NI
- NI Housing Executive
- Belfast City Council
- Simon Community

On the Housing Advice NI home page there is a link directing young people where to go for help.

The Housing Advice NI site then offers the visitor four options depending on age.





This includes information on the four tests for homelessness. However, without knowing what these tests relate to and how to approach the Housing Executive when in need a young person may not access the most suitable services. It can be **DIFFICULT** to know what to say and what information to share about your experience, due to **EMBARRASSMENT** about sharing experience of abuse, trafficking etc. Or **FEAR** of involving social services or other statutory agencies that could affect other family members. As a result, a young person will not be allocated the relevant housing points (another system that can be **CONFUSING** without knowledge and understanding) and as such do not get access to the correct support services at the right time.

Furthermore, the high-profile strain on services (not enough beds, having to be in a hostel by 9pm to access a bed or stories of inappropriate accommodation) doesn't help, presenting another barrier to young people coming forward to present.

The experience of young people engaged in this research was that when presenting as homeless the tests weren't explained to them. This is important because if any one of the four tests are not met or a young person is deemed ineligible, they will be refused accommodation and entered into a process of appeal. All of which is explained in a letter which takes a few weeks to process.



Housing Rights I thought was good place to go for information for housing as it was easy to navigate but there was too much information and it wouldn't be useful for a young person in crisis and that they have a page just for young people which is good but can be confusing as they give you information on the 4 tests that you have to do when presenting as homeless which can be confusing because when you become homeless you need information on where to go for help.



Feedback from Youth Apprentice



Personally, for me the website is good if you know what you are looking for. There is a lot of information, and this can be time consuming to find, a separate page for young people means that it may become confusing if clear attention is not being paid. Information seems to be updated regularly, resources vary for issues or circumstances. I do find it useful for myself as it does cover a lot and can sometimes be your first point of call for information.

As NIHE have a statutory duty to help those who may find themselves homeless or needing housing support the tests are carried out to understand the needs of the individual, to see what help can be offered if any and what that may look like - support staying where they are, Full Duty Applicant (accepted under all 4 tests).



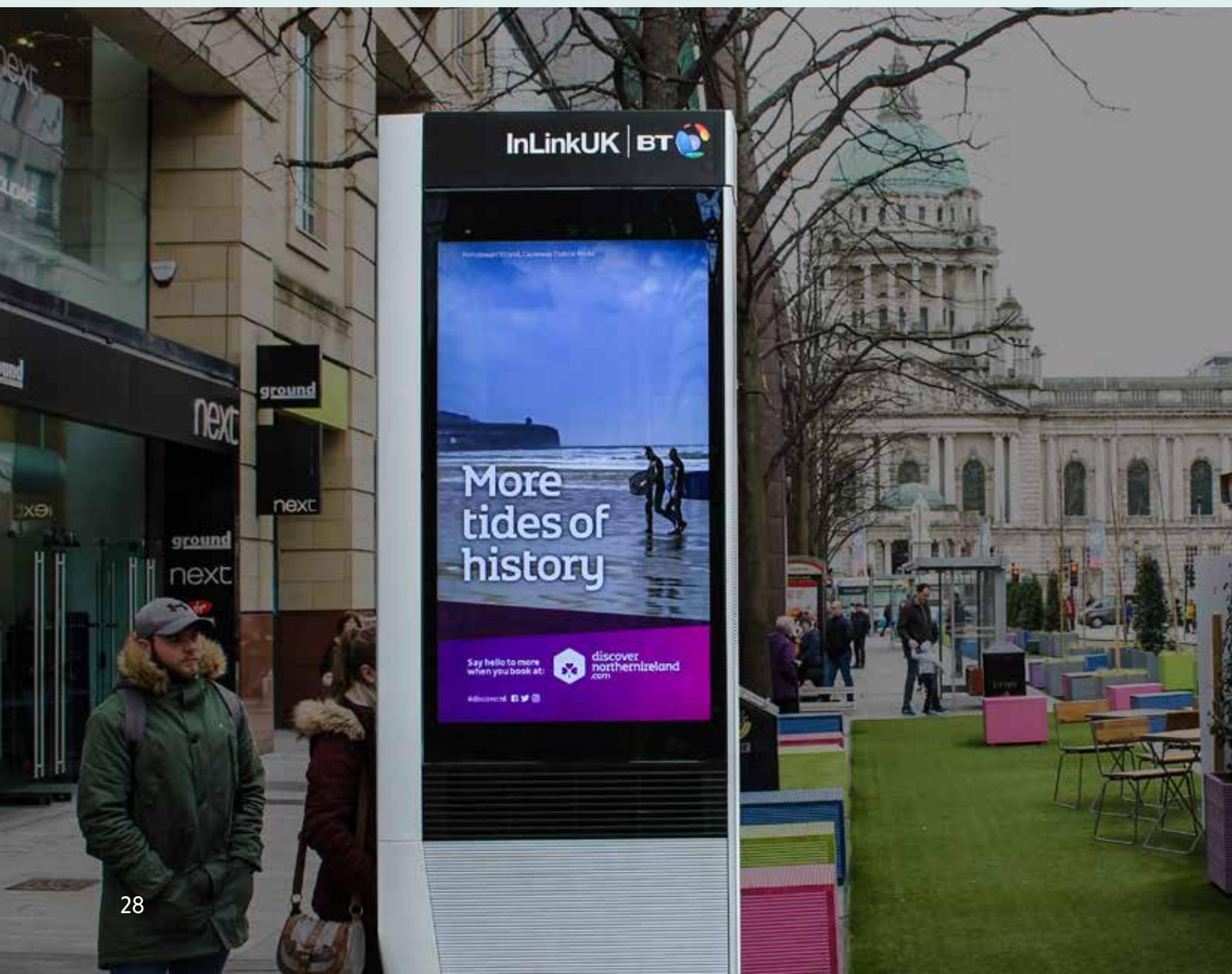
Feedback from Youth Apprentice



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The desk review was also informed by the Youth Apprentice's arranging a series of activities with young people from the NIYF 'Relentless Change Programme', the Peace IV Funded 'Amplify' project in Ballymena and engagement within the NIHE Housing Youth Forum. Discussions also took place with other providers such as Extern. It was in these settings that the Youth Apprentices discovered the provision of 'InLink points' in Belfast.

InLink points in Belfast city centre include a one-touch charity button on the inbuilt tablet which starts a free call to four national lifeline charities; Childline, End Youth Homelessness, Runaway Helpline, and Samaritans. None of these however were for Northern Ireland, taking callers rather to an English responder.





SOURCES OF SUPPORT FOR HOMELESSNESS

| ORGANISATION | PROGRAMME / ACTIVITY | STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|--|---|---|
| Housing Advice NI www.housingadviceni.org | They provide reliable independent housing advice and information such as housing problems, homelessness, housing options, renting privately and housing issues that people from specific groups face | They have a section that is advice for young people when they become homeless at the age of 16/17, 18/21 & 21+. They also have a section on how to avoid homelessness. Due to COVID-19 they made a new section for you to get advice about your housing options during the pandemic | To find this information you will have to go searching for it and if a young person were to become homeless then they're not going to have the time and patience to sit and read through it therefore it is not useful. |
| Extern www.extern.org | Run several programmes to help reduce offending and the impact of offending on the victims and the community, mental health, and for looked after children | Have a multi-disciplinary homeless team. Once you get onto their page it gives you a list of things, they offer support with and how to access the service. | You need to type in the address online and then look through their page to see the services they offer. |
| Housing Rights www.housingrights.org.uk | Housing Rights support members of the public and housing advice professionals on what you are entitled to, they also provide numerous training courses. | They help provide information around housing rights, the point system and anything in between. During COVID-19 they have added more abouts your rights and more about rent arrears. | Internet site is extremely hard to understand due to there being so much information on it. |
| Social services www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/social-services | Social Services have a statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable children and adults and can provide a range of services to children and their parents, usually within the own home environment and co-ordinated by a social worker. | When on their website it easy to navigate as they have divided it up into sections of the types of people they help. Also, they have a section for safeguarding and information for careers in social work. | On their website there isn't much to do with homelessness on it meaning if you were a young adult aged 16/17 there isn't any information for them to know what to do or go for help. |



| ORGANISATION | PROGRAMME / ACTIVITY | STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|---|--|--|--|
| Simon Community www.simoncommunity.org | They provide temporary accommodation services for those that are homeless and that are in need. They give support when needed to anyone using their service. | The Simon community website have a section to help prevent homelessness, they also state they work in partnership with the housing executive and use a housing first approach. | The information that they give isn't quick easy access as its too detailed and would not be good in a crisis. |
| Northern Ireland Youth Forum www.niyf.org | Northern Ireland Youth Forum promote the voice and advocate on behalf of young people, they also deliver a range of different projects and conduct research to make sure that the voice of young people is heard | Northern Ireland Youth Forum give you videos showing what to do when you become homeless, they have been working with housing executive for several years to create awareness of homelessness. | You need to type in the address online and then look through their page to see the services they offer. |
| MACS NI www.macsni.org | They provide a range of support services for children and young people that are homeless and/or at risk of homelessness, young people leaving care, substance abuse, etc. They give housing support, floated support, and well-being support . | Their website is easy to navigate and is straight to the point with a lot of information on what it is they do. | On the website they do not give any direct information on where to go if you become homeless and/or to prevent homelessness. |
| Welcome Organisation www.homelessbelfast.org | Offer a floating support service, street outreach service, a drop-in centre and have crisis accommodation for women. | The information that is on the website like the welcome stories add a really nice touch and make the website more personal. | When trying to see how you would access them you have to use their donation page. Not helpful if you are looking quick, straight to the point information. |
| NIVCA www.nicva.org | Give practical advice, support, and training to the community/voluntary sector | There is good information on here about getting involved within your community that might prevent homelessness. | There's too much information and if you to become homeless you would find it hard to navigate. |



JOURNEY MAPPING: CASE STUDIES

It was felt that the intervention and support provided at this early stage depends heavily on who the young person speaks to at the end of a phone or in person. This person needs to have empathy for the needs of the young person or there may be a lack of understanding about specific circumstances (and as a result, points wrongly allocated) for young people.

ROBERT'S STORY

Robert grew up in and out of the care system and had a hard up bringing as he was neglected as a child by his parents. Robert lived with his Granny and Granda for several years and it was getting to the point where he could no longer stay there as it was not suitable for him.

So, Robert went to the Housing Executive for the first time, and he said that it was a scary process as he felt everyone was judging him. The Housing Executive put him into a hostel where he thought he would feel safe but that was not the case. He stayed there for two years and needed out as he could not cope with the drug abuse being done there, therefore Robert became homeless again and moved back in with his Granny and Granda.

Then again it was unsuitable for him so ended up moving back into the same hostel again. He stayed there for two more years but when he stayed there, he felt that the staff didn't want to help him. The reason he felt that they didn't want to help him was that when he asked them to check and see if the points that he was allocated were correct they didn't follow up on it therefore Robert lost out on extra points while living in the hostel. The hostel Robert stayed in could only have him up until his 26th birthday then he would have to move out but leading up to this the hostel that he stayed in didn't put things in place for when he was moving out therefore Robert ended up becoming homeless again living on his granny and Granda's sofa.



COLLETTE'S STORY

Collette grew up with a single parent household and had a normal childhood but when she turned 17 years old Collette and her mum were constantly arguing with each other, so it came to be unsuitable for her to live there anymore. So, Collette went to the Housing Executive for help as she had nowhere to go.

The Housing Executive didn't really have anywhere to put her, so they put her in a single let house that was hard to access and was not really suitable for her to live in as there was three bedrooms and there was oil for her heating, so this was not suitable at all as she was a single woman and didn't have much of an income to keep the house going.

Collette felt really scared as she had this house to herself as she was living with her mum and nephew, so she was used to having company to reassure her. Finally, Collette had got a two-bedroom flat that was much better suited to her needs, and she had mental health problems and needed someone to stay with her every once a while. A little after a year having this flat someone had decided to throw a brick through her window, so therefore this tenancy was no longer suitable for her to live in.

From this Collette went to the Housing Executive again to see what they could do as she felt so hopeless, and they had to put her into temporary accommodation in Flax Foyer where she lived for a few months before getting another tenancy.



KAI'S STORY

Kai grew up with a family setting that often struggled with addiction and underlying mental health issues. Kai seen many of hostels & Woman's Aid with her mum and can remember issues faced within the family unit from an extremely young age, Kai said the bad times stick with her more. Kai's mum tried her best to keep the problems to herself. As Kai grew up, she started to realise what was going on and taking in everything without any support or guidance on how to deal with this.

Things started to spiral out of control as things within the family unit continued to break down. Kai started engaging in dodgy situations, taking drugs and drinking whenever possible. This was Kai's way of handling things. Aged 14 Kai got pregnant, and this opened problems no one expected. Social services became involved, school changed everything went downhill. Feeling that she received no support but criticised for every choice she made. There was no guidance, but she was meant to know how to handle life how a young age.

Social services supported her to contact the Housing Executive as she was only 16. The adults talked above her head and nothing was explained to her. Decisions were made without her input. Women's Aid staff were really helpful though explaining to her what was happening as outlined in the letters she was sent and supporting her to attend appointments.

Aged 18 she gained her own tenancy but within 12 months had to leave due to domestic violence. Kai then got floating support and extra support from social services and managed to gain another tenancy and maintain this a lot better as she was given more tools and knowledge on how to deal with situations better. Kai stated that not having parents around made it harder to stay on track as your able to do your own thing which doesn't always have outcomes and that with more support and encouragement to question what the NIHE were saying she would have been more knowledgeable.



INTERVIEWS AND BEST PRACTICE

In addition to desk-based research the Youth Apprentices actively engaged with key stakeholders and sought models of good practice from other jurisdictions.

Whilst face to face visits were restricted because of COVID-19 the Youth Apprentices did attend a best practice visit to Centrepoin in Manchester before the pandemic in early 2020.

VISIT TO CENTREPOINT, MANCHESTER

Centrepoin offer specific services for young people rather than generic homeless services like NIHE. Supporting young people for up to 2 years and a further 6 months if needed, where possible the same key worker stays with them throughout their journey. The Youth Apprentices concluded,

We should have a place for young people like Centrepoin as this place does all the work the housing executive does only it's just for young people.

What stood out the most from the visit was the approach taken towards all young people. Having someone to speak to and a 'one stop shop to access support and services that are often better resolved together rather than separately even in a crisis.

Support was wrapped around the individual tailored to them with the option of smaller group work settings. Education and life skills were clear in the approach that was taken and of benefit to young people to help maintain/support themselves.

Key workers had access to the Local Council system. They had access to professionals on site to provide key assistance including a Mental Health Team, Men's Mental Health Worker, Child service, drugs and substance abuse worker and Advocacy role, particularly peer advocacy.

FOCUS GROUPS

The Youth Apprentices supported by the Participant Development Worker at the NI Youth Forum, Amanda Stewart, engaged with leading providers of youth support across NI to facilitate focus groups with relevant young people. Attendees represented a mix of young people that had experienced homelessness and those that had not and indeed had little understanding of homelessness.

- Action for Children, Omagh & Fermanagh (In person)
- Ards & North Down Borough Youth Council (no experience of homelessness)
- NIYF Amplify group, Ballymena (no experience of homelessness)
- NI Housing Executive Youth Forum Group, Belfast
- Include Youth 'Give & Take', Derry/Londonderry

Across the five sessions we welcomed 24 young people aged between 14 and 26 with youth leaders also in attendance and contributing to the conversations. Whilst we purposefully did not seek monitoring data there was a stronger female participation with 17 of the 24 participants, a mix of young people from urban and rural areas and those with lived experience and those with no direct experience of homelessness.

Focus groups were completed using a facilitated format that helped set the group at ease before they were asked to share their own experiences and feedback on:

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

Using an exercise, participants shared their thoughts on what makes a home in order to understand expectations and feelings towards homelessness.

HOMELESSNESS

Facilitated discussion on what did and does homelessness mean to participants.

SUPPORT

A series of questions were asked, to identify the sources of support used by participants, what barriers they experienced and where they received positive support in order to identify issues of accessibility, suitability, and quality of content available. Using persona cards participants were given an example of a young person (based on personas from the desk review process) and asked, 'What would you advise this person to do?'



INSIGHTS

At the beginning of each session, all participants were then provided with the chance to 'check in' that allowed for all young people to share how they were feeling at that time and to vocalise any concerns or queries they had about the session.

The first question theme asked 'what does home mean to you' asking young people to think and share all the things that make a home for them and also what conditions do not make a home. What was revealed by those young people attending reflected a broad range of emotional and practical issues around housing.

When considering both aspects, young people identified many basic, inalienable rights (including those identified in the UNCRC) such as:

- **HEAT & A ROOF OVER YOUR HEAD**
- **SAFE SPACE**
- **FAMILY & FAMILY SUPPORT**
- **FOOD! A HOME COOKED MEAL**
- **SECURITY – A SUPPORT SYSTEM**
- **CONTROL, TO PERSONALIZE & MAKE A HOUSE A HOME**
- **PETS**
- **PEACE OF MIND – ME & FAMILY**
(E.G. KNOWING THAT MY MUM IS OK)
- **A PLACE FOR ALL THINGS - LEARNING, WORKING & LIVING**
- **OTHER PEOPLE THERE THAT CARE FOR ME**
- **FREEDOM - TO HAVE A DRINK IF I WANT!**
- **SUPPORTING**
- **SENSE OF COMMUNITY**

Initial responses in each of the sessions were often focused on the basic things that many take for granted such as a 'roof over our head', warmth, food and safety, but invariably turned to more developmental needs such as a place to work and play, where you can have your animals and pets.



The issue of appropriate accommodation placements was a significant discussion point for those young people that had experienced homelessness, as evidenced by this young person's response.



My social worker made out that it would be great for me, it literally felt like 5 steps forward 10 back. If I had have been told the truth I could have mentally prepared for homelessness. Got there, full of drugs parties my door was constantly knocking I was terrified.



Participants were then asked to consider their feelings around a number of themes and asked if they agreed, disagreed or didn't know about the following, with a discussion around each:

- Young people feel comfortable talking about homelessness.
- Homelessness has a negative image in society.
- I have been given information about homelessness which is reliable and helpful.
- There needs to be an awareness raising campaign focusing on youth homelessness.
- Homelessness issues should be discussed more in school and colleges.



It's really difficult and embarrassing asking for help when you think you might be homeless, it would be great to go to a place where you didn't feel judged.





Among the key issues arising from the input from young people were:

STIGMA OF HOMELESSNESS IS CONCERNING

Young people were very conscious of a stigma around homelessness which is exacerbated for youth homelessness and young mums in particular.

THERE IS A FEELING THAT THERE IS NO SUPPORT AVAILABLE

When doing this exercise a lot of the young people were waiting on their peers to answer before giving an answer and that was because they have not been asked these sorts of questions before so therefore have not had to think about it. The first question we asked was 'would young people feel comfortable speaking out about homelessness' and most of the young people said no.

UNAWARE

Young people were broadly unaware of what information is available and where to go to try and access information about homelessness. This was evident not just in the vocalisation from participants but also by the tone of voice and silence when asked the question.

MORE CAN BE DONE TO INFORM AND PREPARE YOUNG PEOPLE.

We asked these questions to young people that have experienced homelessness and those who haven't and most of them said they did not know where to go. Those who did said they would go to a trusted person such as a friend's mum or a youth worker.

When we asked the groups, what would need to happen to make it better they said they need more engagement from schools, youth centres and young people that have experienced homelessness. Also there should be more engagement on social media with the use of social media influencers.

THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF DISADVANTAGE AND HOMELESSNESS

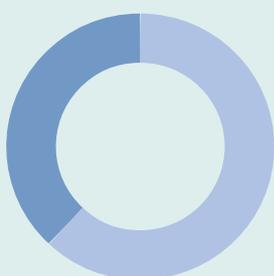
Participants told us that "maybe family (Generational) issues were a factor, explaining that the chances of a kid brought up in drugs that they are more likely to "end up that way".

Findings are reflective of the 2020 review of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018⁹ that identified a number of key targets relevant to this study, a key duty of which was the ‘advice and information duty’.

The duty required local authorities to provide information and advice to anyone in their area (including those who are not owed a prevention or relief duty) about preventing homelessness, securing accommodation, their rights, the available support in the local area, and how to access this. The information and advice must be accessible and meet the needs of different groups in the local community.

The review found that overall, local authorities did not place as much emphasis on this duty as other elements of the Act. They believed they were delivering effectively on the basic requirements of the duty but the impression was that they had not prioritised this as a key area for development in responding to the Act.

Our findings also support the recent Council for the Homeless NI (CHNI) study ‘Young People’s Non-Housing Needs’ that identified a perceived lack of information provided by NIHE staff or information that was not accessible/easy to understand. Moreover, the report identified that:



OVER 60%
DID NOT KNOW WHO OR
WHERE TO GO FOR HELP
WHEN THEY ARE FIRST
HOMELESS (62%)



ALMOST 7/10
FELT EMBARRASSED
AND/OR WORRIED ABOUT
APPROACHING FOR HELP
(68%)



HALF
STRUGGLED TO GET THE
HELP THEY NEEDED.



ACTIONS



Single online reference point with easy to understand and follow guides focused on and for young people.

- A 'one stop shop' standalone reference point to inform young people about options and support
- Written for young people with no jargon and easily explained guides
- Should also help to prevent homelessness by signposting to existing services that are unknown such as Housing Solutions Team, NIHE Housing Officers, other voluntary & community sector providers
- Include stories of experienced young people
- Standalone page and guides for trusted people
- It is critical that such a reference point is live and regularly updated
- Accessible – non-English speakers, visual impairments etc.
- Clear and simple illustration of rights such as having access to a social worker, what a 'Joint Protocol' is etc. This can help remove barriers for young people coming forward.
- Users should be able to remain anonymous.



The best place is somewhere to go where it is only for young people, a friendly environment not like the housing executive. We need youth workers and people who have experienced homelessness to give us the right advice and information. Someone to talk to and someone who actually listens and knows what to do. Tell us the truth too.





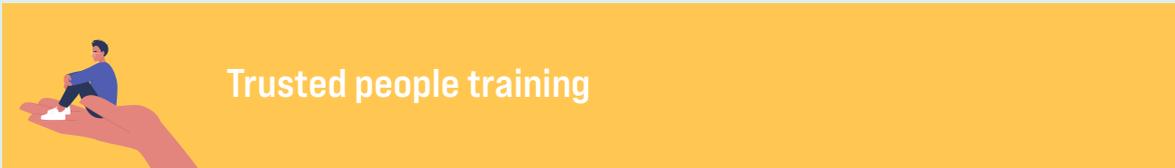
Education from young people that have experienced homelessness (experts by experience).

- Outreach in schools and trusted places like churches, youth groups and on the streets.
- Early intervention, to raise awareness of support and prevent crisis.
- Difficult conversations in safe settings like youth groups or schools – normalising the conversations and allowing young people a chance to have them.
- Helps to de-stigmatise homelessness.
- Teachers provided with essential information on recognising signs of potential homelessness.

The role of hearing from life experienced young people could help reduce the stigma around homelessness. Young people expressed a feeling of judgement of people experiencing homelessness.

As such, language being used and imagery (e.g., not stereotypical images of homelessness of hoodies, people on the streets in destitute) is important.

This must be reflected in all and any site, and materials proposed to allow for open conversations to happen similar to what we are seeing in mental health around #itsoknottobeok



- In many cases a young person has a significant person in their life like a youth worker, teacher etc. whom they would seek advice from. It is essential that such trusted persons are knowledgeable and should be given training so they can give the correct information and signpost effectively.
- Help to understand triggers and indicators of risk and homelessness.
- Training should be provided to ensure the appropriate and consistent skills of trusted people that they know what to do, where to go, how the system works. This can be provided through existing Housing Rights courses or with peer educators delivering a bespoke and more youth focused service.

This is supported by the CHNI study reporting that,

- Training should be provided by young people that have experienced homelessness as they have lived it and young people can then relate to them.
- It must be embedded and consistent, not piecemeal or a one-off exercise.
- A map of these 'safe places' could be included on the proposed information site allowing young people to see local facilities that they can contact.
- Through the proposed website, 'geotagging' can be utilised to ensure that a young person accessing the site is directed to the closest support, safe space or accommodation when they use a mobile phone.





Develop a Campaign that raises awareness and reduces stigma.

- Social Media & sponsored ads (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram) - short video content, ads that you have to watch that cannot be skipped,
- Marketing materials such as leaflets and posters should be placed in public places like schools, doctors, tech and university, Hydebank Wood College and other locations.
- Hold regional events in schools or a large online conference for schools to attend via assemblies would reach a wide audience.
- Engage with other services to make homelessness a topic of discussion e.g.
 - * Independent Advice providers
 - * Into Film: Film Clubs, over 200 Film Clubs in schools across NI could use movies like 'A Street Cat named Bob' to engage young people in discussion.
 - * Utilise existing resources such as 'Pinball' videos from NIYF.



Consider a freephone helpline and signposting service for young people at risk and experiencing homelessness.

- Similar to Childline or lifeline providing a memorable number for young person to reach a knowledgeable, trusted person or volunteer
- Essential that it is memorable, highly visible and well promoted targeting young people.



CONCLUSION

It is the conclusion of the research team that, if implemented, these actions can help to significantly deliver upon the recent Homelessness Strategy aims and objectives, particularly the objective of prioritising the prevention of homelessness and three overarching aims of:

WE HAVE THE SUPPORT, INFORMATION AND SERVICES WE NEED TO PREVENT US FROM BECOMING HOMELESS

IF CRISIS CANNOT BE AVOIDED, WE KNOW WHERE TO GO FOR THE CORRECT INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

WE ARE SUPPORTED TO ACCESS AND SUSTAIN; SAFE, GOOD QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HOMES

Such actions will go some way to ensuring the voice of young people is heard and to recognising the complexities of youth homelessness.



APPENDICES

STAKEHOLDER MAP

| STAKEHOLDER | WHAT DO THEY DO? | WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW FROM THEM? |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Young people affected by homelessness | Experience the issue at hand – uncertainty about what support is available and where to access it | How do they find out about homelessness support? How do they feel when they have accessed support – what works well and what isn't helping? |
| NIHE | Public housing authority Provide affordable housing Provide temporary accommodation | How to apply for housing? How the process works? What are my rights? How long does the process takes? What information and documentation do you need to access their services ? |
| Social Services (social workers) | Social Services have a statutory obligation to safeguard and promote the welfare of vulnerable children and can offer a wide range of care services to children and their parents. Social Services' care department helps ensure children are healthy, safe, and well looked after. | How will their decisions impact my life? What do they need to know about me? How is my information dealt with and used? Who has an impact on my life? How I understand the information given and the process I've to go through. What they expect of me. Who helps with what? What will my support look like? Who's there in my time of need? How will you help? |
| Housing Advice | Specialist Housing Advisors provide information, advice and legal help on complex housing problems. This includes rent and mortgage arrears, tenants' rights and responsibilities, transfer requests, homelessness, disrepair, possession, warrants, landlord/tenant disputes and arbitration applications. | What are my rights? Who can support me? What does the process look like? Dose the service signpost if they recognize their client has additional needs? Will I get support throughout the process? |
| NI Direct | Provides a wide range of information | |



| STAKEHOLDER | WHAT DO THEY DO? | WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW FROM THEM? |
|--|---|---|
| Simon (CAP Team) & other Voluntary & Charitable Orgs incl. Foyer | Provide temporary accommodation to those in need. CAP have the information on the availability of beds within Northern Ireland's Simon communities. Provide specialized support within local areas. Homeless prevention, health and well-being and practice development. And young person's support service | How do I access the service? What information do you need from me? What will I expect the process to look like? Where do I go if I have no food? Do you offer addiction support? Can I have an addiction but still be entitled to a place/bed? Do I have to pay rent? Who helps with forms? |
| Belfast City Council | Belfast City Council is the local authority with responsibility for part of the city of Belfast. Bins, rubbish, birth certs, local events, dog licenses, death certs | How do I access the services they provide? Where can I get the information needed on services they provide? |
| Blue Light / Emergency Services (PSNI / Ambulance) | Help those in need of medical attention. Help find those in distressed situations Provide emergency care to those in need. Eliminate risks i.e. fires, crashes, emergency blood needed. lifesaving treatment. | What to do in an emergency? How to handle the situation? Do I need extra support? How do I access help? Who helps with what? Are there different numbers for different people? Dose those involved share information needed? Are you able to sign post me or offer any additional help I may need? |
| Doctors (Health & Social Care) | Doctors are specially trained and licensed medical professionals, and their job is to make a diagnosis (find what's making you ill) and then, treat you so that you can get better. There are many different types of doctors, like specialists, emergency room doctors, surgeons, and laboratory physicians | How can you help? How often should I see you? Can you sign post to other places. Do I need documentation to access a doctor? Can you support me with a range of different issues? Who helps if you can't? |



THE CHANGE PROJECT

A PEER MENTORING PROJECT
Delivered by young people for young people



**Are you aged
16-25 and at risk
of being homeless?**

**Do you know and
understand your
housing rights?**

**Do you know
where to go for
help and support?**

Everyone deserves a safe and stable place to live, it's scary when you don't know where to turn. We've been there, we listen and we will support you to make a plan.



MEET THE TEAM



My life has been challenging but I'm rather stubborn and won't let anything hold me back. Growing up in the care system has made me more determined to overcome the many challenges I have faced and because of this I have developed a passion and commitment to support other young people.

I believe that with the correct support, help and guidance you can overcome any situation in life.

Having a friendly face and someone to talk to can make all the difference! A problem shared is a problem halved.

For help or support contact:

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02890 331990
www.niyf.org





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