



Breaking it Down: Developing Whole-Family Approaches to Youth Homelessness





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The project team: Jo Gunner, Emily Petheram and Louise Seaman, YMCA England; Victoria Rugg, CAYSH; Lori Streich, Rowan Associates

Introduction

ABOUT THIS REPORT

At the heart of this report are the views of 50 parents and carers of homeless teenagers. As family breakdown is the most common trigger for teenage homelessness, it follows that to prevent homelessness there is a need to understand parents' views on what helps families stay together and prevents teenagers becoming homeless.

This report develops new perspectives on whole-family approaches to preventing and tackling youth homelessness. Parents' experiences of successful approaches to homelessness prevention are included, alongside their recommendations for appropriate accommodation for teenagers. The report also includes the views and experiences of key agencies and provides examples of effective interventions with families at risk. The report builds on work developed through the National Youth Homelessness Scheme, earlier consultation with homeless young people (YMCA England, 2007, *On the Right Track*) and consultation with parents in Brighton (Hove YMCA, 2008, *Breaking it Down: A Consultation with Parents about the Causes of Homelessness in Brighton and Hove*).

A summary version of this report is available separately from YMCA England.

The Aim of this Report is to:

- Identify ways in which existing services can be adapted to better support the parents of teenagers to prevent homelessness.
- Acknowledge the potential future role to be played by additional services that might help families stay together or reconnect once a young person has left home.
- Highlight the importance of holistic, whole-family approaches to tackling youth homelessness.
- Provide parents with a forum so their specific needs may be addressed when tackling youth homelessness.

This study set out to discover the views of parents of young people who had been homeless. We wanted to find out their ideas about:

- Existing services and how these could be adapted to improve take-up and outcomes in terms of supporting the parents of teenagers to prevent homelessness.
- Potential future services that might help families stay together or reconnect once a young person has left home.

AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THIS REPORT

■ Communities and Local Government

This report is funded by Communities and Local Government as part of the National Youth Homelessness Scheme. The National Youth Homelessness Scheme was launched in 2007 to assist local authorities and their partners in bringing to an end the use of bed & breakfast facilities for homeless 16- and 17-year-olds. Since the beginning of the Scheme, the number of 16- and 17-year-olds accepted as homeless and subsequently placed in bed & breakfast accommodation in England has fallen as local authorities and their partners introduce new measures to prevent homelessness. These include providing alternatives to bed & breakfast accommodation, improving existing accommodation and supporting pathways towards independence.

■ The YMCA in England

The YMCA Movement in England is made up of 135 local YMCAs working to ensure that young people have opportunities to belong, thrive and make a positive contribution to their communities.

YMCA England represents and develops the YMCA Movement in England. In 2006, YMCA England launched the Step-In project to prevent teenage homelessness and provide safe accommodation for those who most need it. With the support of Communities and Local Government and local authorities, six pilot projects across the country are developing new ways of delivering services. These projects have undertaken to pass on what they are learning so that the next generation of work benefits from their experience. Step-In projects include supported lodgings schemes, school education projects, family support and mediation, easy-access housing advice and work with the private rented sector. In their first year Step-In projects helped 1,396 teenagers: 1,174 with early advice and education, 85 with family support and mediation and 137 with a safe place to live and support for the future.

■ Croydon Association for Young Single Homeless (CAYSH)

CAYSH is a charity that works to enable young people to fully meet their potential. CAYSH responds to this challenge by providing access for the excluded, support to the vulnerable and safe accommodation to those in housing crisis.

Research Methodology

During the summer of 2008, YMCA England and CAYSH asked 50 parents and carers of homeless and formerly homeless teenagers their views on what helps families facing this situation.

Location

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of parents consulted are from London and the South East (Brighton & Hove, Bromley, Croydon, Hammersmith & Fulham and Lambeth) – historically areas with some of the highest levels of youth homelessness in the country. Information was also gathered from parents from rural and urban areas across England (Burton-on-Trent, Mendip, Stockport and Wakefield).

Interviews

Twenty-four in-depth interviews were carried out with parents and carers who have experienced the homelessness of a child.

Interviews were arranged through local agencies and took place, primarily, at agency venues. Parents were offered a £10 voucher to thank them for taking part. All interviews were carried out by researchers from CAYSH and YMCA England. Interviewers were trained by YMCA England to ensure consistency of approach. Interviewees were briefed on how the interviews might be used and asked to sign a consent form.

Questionnaires

Additionally, a short questionnaire was distributed to parents by local authorities, YMCAs and by CAYSH. The questionnaires were designed to enable parents to complete them independently, or with the help of agency staff. Twenty-six questionnaires were completed and returned. A sample questionnaire can be viewed on page 31 of this report.

Agency Focus Group

Key government departments, local authorities and service providers were invited to take part in a seminar. Initial findings from the consultation were presented and a group discussion held to test the findings and establish what is realistic in terms of resourcing services. The agencies' views on the feasibility of implementing parents' ideas for change are incorporated into this report.

Case Studies

Information from the interviews has also been used to provide case studies of individuals to highlight the issues explored in this report. To protect the identity of young people and their families, specific details, including names, may have been changed.

Case Studies of Effective Practices

Using contacts in the YMCA and through the National Youth Homelessness Scheme network, a number of case studies were compiled. Each outlines aspects of good practice in service delivery, identifies why the particular service works and highlights key learning points. The case study data is drawn from organisations with track records in good service provision with families. Semi-structured telephone interviews were carried out with each to verify their practice and ensure a consistent approach.

Analysis and Recommendations

Data from the parent interviews and questionnaires has been analysed to provide both quantitative and qualitative data. From this, key themes have been identified and these form the basis for recommendations concerning future service delivery.

Families' Characteristics

Of the 50 families whose views are represented in this report, the majority of respondents (88%) are parents; the remainder are extended family, mostly grandparents, and are referred to collectively as 'parents'.

The consultees are those who responded to agency requests. Agencies reported that they were often unable to contact young people's parents, as families were entirely estranged. Of the interviewees, one has no contact with their child, ten have occasional contact, often by phone or text and a further ten are in close contact including three who have returned home. The contact between family members for questionnaire respondents was not recorded.

At the time of the interviews, 46% of young people had found a suitable place to live. For some this was with family and for others it was with the YMCA or in other supported accommodation.

Ages and Reasons for Young People Leaving Home:

- The majority of the young people featured (80%) left home aged 16 or 17 years old, two had left aged 15 years old and young people from the remaining eight families are either older (six respondents) or their age is not known.
- Most parents (80%) say the young person's behaviour (sometimes as a result of identified mental health issues) is a factor in their leaving. 28% gave this as the only reason.
- 12% gave parents' relationships as the main reason for a young person leaving home. A further 10% cited parental violence, often combined with drug or alcohol use, as the young person's main reason for leaving. 14% of respondents also gave overcrowding as a reason for their teenage child leaving home.
- Few families (three) thought that their child was old enough to cope alone at the age they left (15 or 16 years old) although it was never the only reason for their leaving. None of the families interviewed identified solely positive reasons for their child leaving home.

'72% of parents believe that **extra help could prevent the breakdown of family units** and young people from leaving home'

Executive Summary

Every year, thousands of young people leave home before they reach 18. While some are able to find suitable accommodation, many others become homeless, frequently moving on from temporary residences and even sleeping rough from time to time. With the absence of a stable living environment, young people often find it difficult to pursue education or employment, making them particularly vulnerable.

The breakdown of family units has been identified as the main trigger for homelessness amongst 16- and 17-year-olds. The YMCA believes that unless services move towards a more holistic approach to tackling youth homelessness, which includes the participation of parents, children and extended families, current provisions will become ineffective in providing long-term solutions to these issues.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

The YMCA believes that extra help and support concerning access to services, supporting families and providing suitable accommodation could avert the breakdown of family units and prevent young people from leaving home. Areas requiring particular attention include:

- The availability of family support and mediation services as an effective means of encouraging families to improve communication and clarify boundaries and expectations;
- The accessibility of support at an earlier stage, before it comes to the point where relationships break down and young people leave home;
- The availability of independent advice services.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

The research identified shortcomings in the range and accessibility of services currently on offer to young people and their families. Particular points include:

- The likelihood that families feel comfortable and confident in asking for help in the first instance;
- The ease in which families can find appropriate services through a wide variety of channels;
- The presence of approachable, welcoming staff who provide clear, accurate information;
- The flexibility of services on offer to enable the active participation of family members in resolving housing issues;
- The presence of efficient communication structures between service providers to enable families to access multiple services with ease.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

The YMCA recognises that many individuals rely on the support of extended family and friends when addressing the issues of inter-familial conflict and youth homelessness. Extended families often lack the resources – both financial and information-based – to best support their relative. In addition, many families do not have extended family to rely on in times of crisis. Particular observations include:

- The imperative role played by extended family and friends in providing temporary accommodation to young people;
- The importance of extended family and friends in being the initial point of contact for families in conflict, before moving on to professional services;
- The need to support the role of extended family and friends through information-sharing and guidance;
- The need for professional services to support isolated parents.

PROVIDING SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

The research found that the majority of parents consider supported accommodation to be the most suitable alternative for young people who are unable to live at home. Additional findings include:

- The imperative role played by short-term (respite) accommodation in providing a starting point from which suitable long-term solutions can be found;
- The need for respite accommodation to be part of a broader structure of services, including family support such as counselling and mediation, which provides a holistic approach to the issue of youth homelessness;
- The importance of flexibility with regards to supported accommodation to address the specific requirements of the individual in question, particularly those escaping violence or abuse.

Key Findings

50 parents from across England responded to interviews and questionnaires led by YMCA England. The statistical information featured in this report is derived from these responses.

In addition, 30 agencies contributed information and ideas through a focus group and telephone interviews.

Many parents described a positive experience of services, seeing tangible results which have improved their lives. However, it is evident that there are areas where improvement is still required.

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

- 72% of parents believe that extra help could prevent the breakdown of family units and young people from leaving home.
- 46% of parents would like to see more support for families living together. They also identified family support and mediation as an effective way of encouraging families to improve communication and clarify boundaries and expectations.
- 40% of respondents want help earlier, before it comes to the point where relationships break down and their child leaves home.
- 42% of parents found housing advice the most helpful intervention. Of these, two-thirds say that independent advice services are the most helpful.

ACCESS TO SERVICES

Parents appreciate services which are easily accessible and:

- Provide initial information through widely accessible venues, such as community centres and schools, about where to go for help and what to expect;
- Have welcoming staff members who provide good advice and clear, accurate information with decisions confirmed in writing;
- Assist parents to participate in resolving their child's housing issues by offering home visits and flexible opening hours.

Families often need to engage the support of multiple services and many suggest that supported referrals, good communication and information sharing helps them to make the best possible use of the services on offer, resulting in a more holistic approach to family issues.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

54% of families have been helped by family or friends and of these:

- 44% of young people have stayed with extended family or friends at some point;
- 25% of parents consider family members to be the best source of help.

In addition, 34% of parents want support in parenting their teenagers but find that asking for help is not easy. Some parents commented that assistance would come best from their peers.

Some parents and agencies suggest that the role played by extended families in offering advice, information and accommodation would be strengthened and sustained through the provision of information and short-term financial support.

PROVIDING SUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

- 74% of respondents consider supported accommodation to be most suitable for 16- and 17-year-olds who cannot live with their family.
- 36% of respondents say short-term (respite) accommodation in times of crisis would help families stay together, providing interim solutions until alternatives are found. To be wholly effective, respite accommodation should be combined with family support (including counselling and mediation). It should also enable families to build in temporary breaks and have the capacity to provide out-of-area placements for young people escaping violence or abuse.
- Most parents believe that it is in the best interests of 16- and 17-year-olds to be living with adults who can provide support, guidance and a safe environment while they learn the skills they need to live independently.

Preventing Homelessness

Our first thought was to go to the Council, but... it was confusing, all these different places to go to. When you are in a distressing situation you find it hard to know what to do.

- 72% of parents believe that extra help could prevent the breakdown of family units and young people from leaving home.
- 46% of parents would like to see more support for families living together. They also identify family support and mediation as effective means of encouraging families to improve communication and clarify boundaries and expectations.
- 40% of parents want help earlier, before it comes to the point where relationships break down and their child leaves home.
- 42% of parents find housing advice the most helpful intervention. Of these, two-thirds say that independent advice services are the most helpful.
- 82% of parents have used housing advice services.

AGENCY CASE STUDY: HASS

London Borough of Southwark Housing Assessments and Support Service (HASS)

The Youth Team is part of Community Housing Services and is located in the Housing Assessments and Support Service (HASS) in Southwark. It is a multi-agency team which specialises in homeless prevention work with all those aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless.

The team aims to prevent homelessness by addressing parents' practical issues, including income maximisation and overcrowding; addressing young people's challenging behaviour and providing a range of options to prevent homelessness. These include mediation and respite accommodation and support for young people wanting to move back into education, employment or training.

The current team was established in April 2008 and comprises seven staff: a Youth Homelessness Manager, a Prevention Officer, Families Workers, a Social Worker, a Youth Offending Team (YOT), a Resettlement Officer and a Connexions Worker.

Sandra Pass, the Deputy Business Manager responsible for HASS' young people's team, believes the success of the service is a result of its multi-agency approach. The multi-agency make-up of the team has provided a depth of understanding which addresses a whole range of issues experienced by young people and their families. By creating an internal 'one-stop-shop', it allows for a holistic, tailored approach, enabling each team member to identify individual needs and redirect people to the most relevant agency.

Where possible, HASS provides support so that young people can remain in the family home. If this is not possible, young people are referred to the Gateway Foyer (run by Look Ahead Housing) where they are offered accommodation for six weeks or longer on an excluded licence. All young people referred to this respite provision receive intensive key work to address the issues behind the crisis which has led to an initial referral, and mediation to repair the family relationship.

The multi-agency approach generates a range of productive partnerships including Look Ahead Housing and St Christopher's which are developing homelessness awareness packages to be delivered in schools.

**Contact Sandra Pass,
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INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY: REBECCA

Rebecca, 17, recently returned home to live with her mother and two younger brothers after two months of living with a friend. Rebecca's father has not been part of her life since she was young and the rest of Rebecca's extended family live abroad.

Rebecca and her mother had a close relationship when Rebecca was younger. However, when Rebecca reached 16 her mother felt things began to change. Rebecca seemed unhappy, communication broke down and Rebecca's mother feels her daughter's behaviour began to deteriorate. As things got more difficult at home she used the internet to search for help and advice:

I looked at pages on dealing with teenagers and the emotions they're going through because I'd forgotten what it was like. Some of the things she does brings back memories of some of the things I did and the way I felt at that age.

The family then approached Social Services for help and ultimately were referred to the local Family Support Service. They arranged for mediation between Rebecca and her mother, helping them to learn to communicate more effectively and providing information on options both for support and housing.

Rebecca's mother sums up what worked:

[The family support worker] is easy to talk to, but also very professional. She weighed up the situation quickly and knew how to deal with it. Everything she said she would do, she has done. She had a 'can-do' attitude. She was very relaxed and you didn't feel she was criticising or judging and having someone to talk to has been essential. She made me feel like there was a light at the end of the tunnel and paved the way forward. Rebecca could see I was trying to help which made her behaviour improve a bit and since Rebecca moved back home [the family support worker] stayed in touch with us.

Access to Services

The help is there, but I think people are not made aware of it. You have to be willing to go out and look for it.

When parents want help, they tell us that it is often difficult to find out what services are available and what each can provide.

Parents want information for both young people and parents. They say that there is stigma attached to asking for help and therefore suggest advertising 'in places that anyone might go to from time-to-time'. Suggestions include noticeboards, community centres, schools, supermarkets and tenants' newsletters.

There should be more information so young people and their parents know where to go before things pass the point of no return – this should be available in places like Connexions, places young people would go such as schools and places parents would go such as supermarkets.

Maybe a card with numbers and places where they can go... like you have one for refugees... they could have cards they give out in schools so they do know where to go and they do know who to turn to.

Parents also suggest delivery in a range of different venues, especially alongside other services which are already used by young people and their families:

If they ran surgeries like they do for politicians... also on buses, in doctor's surgeries, libraries and on the internet.

I'm aware of a primary school which has a counsellor-style worker who young people can talk to about problems and get advice.

[My daughter's] school provided her with help when she became homeless. She got quite a lot of help from them about where to go and phoning agencies for help.

Some parents suggest that there should be specific job roles in schools with the objective of telling people about services.

If they had things in schools, Family Liaison Officers or people like that, where they could go and they could get help... they probably wouldn't feel as if it was stigma going into a school rather than going into a police station or an official building like [the Council].

Most families experience the difficulties of transition though it does not always lead to homelessness. Many of the agencies consulted say that families at risk when their child is 13 or 14 will not necessarily identify a need for a homelessness service. Agencies suggest that the focus needs to be more on providing support to young people in transition rather than young people facing homelessness.

Agencies suggest that positive messages about families wanting to stay together need to be reinforced and that there is a need to identify the trigger points that can turn the normal process of transition into the need for crisis intervention.

Agencies also recognise the value of early interventions and suggest that further resources are needed if additional demands are placed on schools. Some agencies are already providing such a service.

We [Hove YMCA] find working with Education Welfare Officers in schools a good way to reach out to young people; to recognise the early signs and risk indicators of them becoming homeless.

CLEAR INFORMATION AND ACCURATE ADVICE

The advisor explained all the [accommodation] options and support that was available and helped us decide which might be best... they were clear that it could take a while and didn't raise expectations.

62% of parents value clear, accurate information and good advice about housing and support options. Clear information helps families make realistic decisions and know what they can reasonably expect.

Additionally, parents have some specific suggestions about how services might be improved by having decisions and processes clarified in writing.

Once [the process] reaches a point where it is unlikely to change, it would be good if agencies communicated in writing to the parent and child.

This respondent suggests that such a document might include details of the available options and what to expect, including milestones for the future, usual waiting times for various services and the processes involved. She believes this would clarify expectations and avoid having to repeat earlier discussions.

Good links between services

If they worked together and tried to do something about a young person and the situation they are in, I think it would make it a lot easier.

Families often need the support of more than one agency and want services to communicate with each other more effectively to avoid having to tell their stories repeatedly.

A worker who liaises between Social Services, housing and schools can raise an early warning signal if they see a young person struggling. [A neighbour] knows a primary school that has a worker like this.

Agencies speak of the value of the Common Assessment Framework and the Team Around the Child approach in integrating support and agree that clearer signposting between services is needed. Agencies suggest that connections with the risk of homelessness need to be more explicit and housing needs to be involved as a matter of course in multi-agency planning. In particular, both parents and agencies noted the potential value of Targeted Youth Support and of co-located youth advice, counselling and support services.

Somewhere that young people could go to get information about a whole range of relevant topics – all located in the same place.

Access and referrals

24% of parents would welcome home visits, particularly for parents who are working or have younger children.

They were fine because they would do home visits, outreach services and stuff like that...

22% of parents value services that are easy to get to and have flexible opening hours. This includes evening opening times, especially for people who are working during daytime office hours.

It would be good if the places were open more in the evening.

28% of parents value short waiting times for initial appointments.

Quicker help would also be good – even when [my daughter] went against her normal behaviours and went to ask for help, still nothing happened and she was told to wait.

18% of parents want supported referrals to other services.

He got a mentor who did very well with him – he helped him fill in forms, went with him to appointments and sat and listened if he wanted to talk.

Agencies agree that such referrals are needed and speak of the need for agencies themselves to develop their understanding of what is available.

Welcoming staff

[My grandson] benefits from having an outsider to talk to as well as us. Sometimes he responds better to those who don't know him and will tell them more.

36% of parents identify staff attitudes and particularly how welcoming staff are, as a vital part of what makes a service particularly helpful. Parents appreciate staff who take their concerns seriously and who treat them with respect. Parents also recognise that this needs to be reciprocated. Parents say that they often just need someone to listen to them and that they and their children appreciate having someone neutral to talk to.

Parents particularly value staff they can trust and often define this as staff members who fulfil their promises.

If I couldn't trust someone, I wouldn't say anything to them. I wouldn't ask for any help. If I couldn't trust that he or she would be helpful to me, supportive to me, then I wouldn't go.

It is important to persevere and find someone that can help you. Even if you don't get on with the first person, it is important to keep trying.

Securing Resources

Agencies discuss methods of securing resources and identify the need for shared corporate outcomes e.g. making links concerning the number of young people who are engaged with homelessness services, who also access family support services and are also not in education, employment or training. By making these links at the strategic level, it becomes possible to generate a sense of shared outcomes and work.

The need for representation from housing in key strategies was highlighted and for homelessness targets to be incorporated into Children and Young Peoples Plans.

AGENCY CASE STUDY: CAYSH

Croydon Association for Young Single Homeless (CAYSH)

CAYSH (Croydon Association for Young Single Homeless) is a key provider of services for young people with housing needs in Croydon. It aims to provide young people with advice and access to safe and settled housing, and the opportunity to gain the skills needed to live independently. It does this by:

- Working with young people and the wider community to maintain local links and support networks.
- Promoting a secure environment where young people can take positive steps towards independence.
- Providing housing opportunities and informed, reliable housing advice.
- Helping young people to access appropriate training, employment opportunities and counselling support to underpin long-term independent living, or providing this themselves.

CAYSH provides accommodation and housing services for over 120 young people aged 16 to 25 in the Croydon area through supported housing schemes, a supported lodgings scheme, a private rented sector access scheme and floating support.

In addition to providing realistic solutions for young people with housing needs, CAYSH also places a strong emphasis on homelessness prevention. It runs HAP<25, a multi-agency drop-in centre in Croydon, established by the Housing Department, Children's Services and Connexions in partnership with CAYSH. HAP <25 works with around 1,500 young people a year, approximately 70% of whom are aged 16-17. Around 1,000 of these (or two-thirds), are supported to return home. The range of needs among young people using HAP<25 has created a culture of innovation. A number of agencies work from the same location and the project's wide range of services includes:

- General advice about housing needs and options.
- Referrals to relevant agencies or further work with HAP<25 staff and wherever possible, providing same-day appointments.
- Face-to-face mediation between young people and their families, delivered by Relate.

- Referrals to other agencies and support groups, e.g. careers and employment support, education welfare from schools, colleges and cultural support groups.
- Specialist support for particular groups, such as young offenders.

The multi-agency nature of the service means that young people can access joint assessments by Croydon Council's housing and social services staff based at HAP<25, as well as a range of on-site "surgeries" with other agencies, which include:

- Croydon Adolescents Mental Health Service (mental health/counselling services)
- Off the Record (counselling)
- Action for Children Rightfully Yours (advocacy services)
- Youth Drug Support (drug advice & support)

Family Support Project

CAYSH's new Family Support Project works with clients from age 14 who are at risk of family breakdown and consequent homelessness. Floating support is provided to young people aged 14-17 and their parents while the young person is still living in the family home. Clients are identified through HAP<25 and other local referral agencies.

The project aims to support young people back into education, employment or training to enable a culture of achievement. This in itself can benefit the family and create a more positive home life. It offers weekly support sessions with young people and their parents and supports families to maintain the young person at home and where appropriate, prepare for a planned move. It supports the parent-householder and provides a support plan for the young person that includes the active involvement of the other members of the household. Issues addressed frequently include setting boundaries and house rules, and providing life skills such as cooking and cleaning. Service users can access the HAP<25 services, including mediation, signposting and the support of the HAP Connexions worker.

This pilot scheme defines success as the prevention of homelessness, young people making and keeping to a plan for their future and becoming more confident about their futures.

Specialist service for young offenders

As a response to the particular needs of young offenders, many of whom are homeless or in poor accommodation, CAYSH and Croydon Youth Offending Team (YOT) established a Housing Support Officer post to work with 16–18-year-old YOT clients. The Support Officer is based at the YOT for three days per week and at CAYSH for the remaining two. Employed by CAYSH and funded by Supporting People, all referrals are made from the YOT.

The Support Officer assists young offenders with budgeting, life skills, benefits, employment and training. They also help with placements into emergency accommodation and with planned moves into alternative (usually supported) accommodation. When clients are about to leave custody, CAYSH offers ongoing support with accommodation needs. The aim is to prevent homelessness and support young people in gaining stability in their lives, thus reducing the chance of them reoffending.

An important aspect of the work is to support young people in rebuilding relationships with their families. The service has a forward-looking focus, highlighting options that move young people beyond their past patterns of offending and giving them positive reasons to change. The location of the project enables easy access to CAYSH's family support and mediation services. "Some young offenders prefer to steer clear of the YOT, but there is no stigma about seeing me at CAYSH", said Jane Chinapen, the Support Worker.

The project defines success as being situations in which a young person returns home, or is successfully housed elsewhere and when young people engage with the support and make changes, including improving family relationships.

Anna received an ASBO because of her behaviour in the area around her family home. She therefore had to move out, but was found intentionally homeless. She was angry about what was happening when she went for an interview at a local hostel. Due to her hostile attitude, the hostel would not offer her a place. After working with the Housing Support Worker, Anna went for a second hostel interview. She was willing to engage with the housing provider and was accepted for

housing. From that new start, she was able to repair her relationship with her family and she got the confidence to go on to college. Since then, she has completely turned her life around. What she needed was the support and encouragement to enable her to do this and to believe she could.

Working in partnership to reshape services

CAYSH is one of a number of voluntary organisations which work closely with the local authority, the London Borough of Croydon. There is an increasing awareness of the importance of homelessness prevention services linked to the provision of family support. Placing family support at the heart of a strategic approach to a range of prevention services, Croydon Council is developing a new commissioning framework that will support local providers to deliver quality services and work together in an accredited network of providers. The Council aims to ensure service delivery is consistent, meets the needs of families and offers a range of accessible services across the spectrum of local needs.

Contact Victoria Rugg, Communications Manager, CAYSH, victoria.rugg@caysh.org.

Supporting Families

Perhaps some outside support would have been good, to help the brothers come to terms with their 'baby sister' getting pregnant since their constant verbal abuse towards her made it impossible for my daughter to stay living at home.

Parents interviewed think that support for both themselves and their children would help at times when families face difficulties at home. Families are often extremely resourceful when faced with

a crisis, but they also say that they would welcome some outside intervention.

For families unable to access the right support at the right time, there is a real sense of isolation:

You hear about it [services for young people] on telly and things but when it comes to the crunch there never seems to be anything available.

AGENCY CASE STUDY: HOVE YMCA

Hove YMCA Family Solutions Project

Hove YMCA provides an established housing advice service for young people aged 16-25 in Brighton and Hove. In 2006, the organisation consulted with young people about their experiences to find out how best to tackle youth homelessness. As a result of this process, it became evident that by communicating solely with young people, the concerns of parents and extended families needed to be taken into account. In 2007, Hove YMCA received Communities and Local Government funding to explore these views.

The Family Solutions Project has been designed by applying the findings of this research to Hove YMCA practice. The Family Solutions Project offers a family-focused service which includes:

- Mediation services staffed by two part-time mediators;
- A Family Liaison Worker to support the whole family;
- Respite accommodation and support for 3-4 weeks in Hove YMCA supported accommodation.

The project aims to enable young people to return home for an indefinite period with ongoing support; return home temporarily while alternative accommodation is arranged or to enable young people to transfer to alternative accommodation with family support.

Staffing for the above services is funded by the Homelessness Directorate of Brighton and Hove Council; respite beds are funded through Supporting People. Successful outcomes include enabling young people to return home for an indefinite period with ongoing support, returning home temporarily while alternative accommodation is arranged and a transfer to alternative

accommodation with family support. Support offered is dependent on the whole family agreeing to a support contract. Respite beds are located within existing Hove YMCA supported housing provision and additional services offer family support as part of a holistic package. The Family Solutions Project uses a range of therapeutic, solutions-focused techniques and so extends what is currently offered by the housing advice service.

A core aim of the project is to repair relationships within the family. Usually this is through improving communication between family members so that, if there is a future crisis, the family has the tools to resolve it effectively. By working with families in this way, YMCA staff aim to prevent similar crises developing with younger siblings. The family support work is based on a model which includes solutions-focused therapy and the development of communications methods and core skills.

It is recognised that a family in crisis "can feel like a time bomb, just waiting to explode". Therefore, the respite element of the Family Solutions Project is vital in offering people time apart and the support to reassess their concerns and explore solutions. The families' research showed that there was a need for this holistic and practical approach in order to prevent homelessness and to develop services for 16- and 17-year-olds that acknowledge that, at that age, young people are valuable members of their families.

In the longer term, the Family Solutions Project would like to develop peer support groups for parents, alongside the youth-focused work of Hove YMCA.

Contact Pippa Green, Housing Services Manager, Hove YMCA,
pippa.green@hoveymca.org.uk.

FAMILY RESOURCES

The boys' aunts help out wherever they can as they live nearby, so they support us in taking care of the boys. [My grandson] regularly sees his family; he has a strong support network around him.

54% of parents receive help from relatives and friends, advice, support and often a place for the young person to stay.

25% of parents find extended family to be the best source of help.

I think it's good for him as well to stay with family... it's very important there's someone there to look after a child when he's homeless, like an aunt or grandparents. It's better that way than going to total strangers... it's not very easy, but it is best.

Only three families have no external help and make an important distinction between finding informal support and being expected to manage alone.

If a mother appears to cope she is left to it until she can't, then some help is offered when it's too late for all concerned.

46% of families do not have the support of family or friends. Some simply did not have extended families; others find that family and friends lack the money, space or knowledge of what is available and so are ill-equipped to help.

Parents recognise that help is most effective when they and their child are ready to engage with services. One mother says that her daughter received a lot of support from various people and places but that she did not (yet) wish to be helped.

To a lesser extent, parents draw on the support of friends and neighbours who are able to offer advice, support and at times accommodation. This is viewed as helpful where adults are involved but parents think their children are not yet ready to be living solely with their peers.

Not with friends, if he was living with them all the time, they would just sit around doing nothing, or get into trouble.

SUPPORTING FAMILY COMMUNICATION

AGENCY CASE STUDY: ALONE IN LONDON

Alone in London Mediation Service

Alone in London (ALS), set up a Family Mediation Service in 1996 in response to the large number of service users citing family breakdown as the primary reason for approaching the service. The service works with young people and family members before, during and after crisis periods to improve family relationships and prevent homelessness.

Funded through the Parenting Fund, Local Authorities and Charitable Trusts, the mediation service offers family mediation where young people are at risk of, or are currently, homeless. Each worker has a case load of 40 per year and the aim is for young people to be able to return home with repaired family relationships.

Access to the service is either through ALS or through one of the services with which ALS has a contract, including Local Authority Housing Options Teams and the Southwark Youth Offending Team. Mediation sessions are run in the area local to the family, usually in the office of the referring agency.

ALS offers support with some of the practical issues facing families in crisis, such as benefits and housing difficulties and overcrowding. The mediation work is client-led and directed by the needs of each family. Successful outcomes are to prevent homelessness and also to achieve improved communication and conflict resolution skills.

Homelessness agencies whose staff do not have specialist mediation skills can benefit from buying in specialist mediation on a sessional basis. It enables them to offer a greater range of services without having to invest in this specific expertise themselves.

**Contact Jenny Sharp, Alone in London,
jennysharp@als.org.uk.**



AGENCY CASE STUDY: ST CHRISTOPHER'S

St Christopher's Homeless Intervention Project

This intervention and mediation project in Greenwich has two full time posts, a mediator and school outreach worker and a client list of 30 cases per quarter.

Funded through the London Borough of Greenwich, Voluntary Sector Grant, the project aims to prevent homelessness by helping young people and their families rebuild relationships. The service offers mediation, family support and practical support to address a range of issues such as benefits and overcrowding.

Its primary objective is to stabilise the family crisis so that young people can return home if this is safe or reasonable, or else help them make a planned move into stable accommodation. By enabling improvements in family relationships even if a young person cannot go back home to live, they can still link in with the family to receive support which makes alternative accommodation more sustainable.

St Christopher's Homeless Intervention Project uses a solutions-focused approach and is primarily a housing service, seeking housing-based solutions. Using mediation techniques it addresses a range of issues, such as family housing and overcrowding issues, income maximisation and benefits issues for families and young people and employment and training for young people.

Referrals are from the London Borough of Greenwich Housing Options Team and meetings usually take place at the project's office as this offers a more neutral environment than the family home.

From these initial meetings, mediators and service users consider the issues and devise a plan of action. Mediators will meet with young people and their families separately or together. A great deal of the work focuses on communication and ground rules in the family. Where necessary, they will employ "shuttle mediation" techniques, with the mediator meeting each party individually and passing views and opinions to the other.

The project staff have found that there is a real need to support families and young people to understand the realities of homelessness and to have realistic expectations about what that entails. For young people, this often means understanding that they will not "just get a flat"; and for parents, that the next 6 months will be tough for their young person. Without this homelessness awareness, St Christopher's has found that "both parties can be too willing to go their separate ways".

If accommodation is needed, this is usually provided through CAYSH supported lodgings and other supported housing providers in the London Borough of Greenwich.

Contact Harry Wilkinson, St Christopher's, harrywilkinson@stchris.org.uk, or visit www.stchris.org.uk/hip.



INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY: PETE

When Pete was 13 his parents split up. From then on he argued constantly with his older brother and wouldn't listen to anything his mother told him.

They kept shouting and screaming – I couldn't cope. They were fighting over everything.

Pete went to live with his father for a year but this didn't work out. His father was at work during the evenings so Pete was frequently alone in the house. He moved back in with his mother but continued to argue with his brother. Finally, his mother asked Pete to leave the family home when, during one of the many arguments, he hit his brother. Following this, Pete moved in with a friend.

Pete's mother contacted the local authority housing advice service for longer term accommodation. The housing advice service advised them to try mediation first. Separate sessions were set up with a mediation worker for each brother and their mother.

Pete's mother explained that they were unsure if it would work and it took some time for Pete's older brother to overcome his suspicions and attend.

Later they met in group sessions – first Pete and his mother, and then including his older brother as well. By this stage they were all able to remain calm while discussing the issues and made progress in rebuilding their relationships.

Pete's mother now describes how, as a result of the mediation, Pete has moved out of his friend's house and back to the family home:

[The mediation] got [the brothers] speaking to one another rather than always fighting and shouting. I feel better equipped to deal with his behaviour. It is still not perfect but I can cope, we can talk to each other and have learnt to see things from each other's point of view.

As with many parents we heard from, Pete's mother would have liked the mediation to happen earlier.

We just wish we'd had support before the problems became a crisis. We never knew about the mediation; had no idea what that was all about, but just talking with someone there who wasn't involved in it all... it really did work.

Having the home visits... and [the mediator] being a good listener, that really helped. Because she's an outsider that really helps with the situation. I have her number, so I can call her if I need more help at any point... It was more helpful than I thought it would be.

Parents highlight the need for help to improve communication between family members. 24% have experience of mediation and 14% identify it as a service they would like to see in place in future.

Families access mediation through local housing authorities and their partners and also through health and social services.

By providing an outside view, mediation and family support helps parents and young people talk to each other and perhaps more importantly, to listen to each other:

[The mediator] encouraged a good level of communication between us and paved the way forward. She looked at things from both perspectives; mine and [my son's]. She has a balanced and broad view. When I had nowhere to turn, it was great to find her. I could just offload my problems. She listened and was honest about it all. I don't know what I'd have done without someone like her to talk to.

Interviewees describe the benefits of mediation through its focus on the positive. Mediation uses a solutions-focused approach and works with both parties to consider what they want to happen and what is realistic. In itself, this helps parents to think about what is reasonable, not about what is wrong.

The mediator helped me to bring my solutions, not problems all the time and... stand back a bit more.

Because of the mediation, [my son] could see I was trying to help which made his behaviour improve a bit. That helped us to get on better... things are still not perfect but I can cope and we can talk to each other and we've learnt to see things from each others' point of view.

Talking and listening helps not only parents and their teenagers, but also relationships with other members of the family and relationships between siblings.

They set up a mediation meeting between both brothers as well as me [mother]. It was very helpful, though at first we weren't sure and were suspicious it would work. It got them [the brothers] speaking to one another rather than always fighting and shouting and this made it possible for them to live under one roof again.

Parents who have not experienced mediation are more hesitant about talking with strangers about their family. In some cases, one or more of the parties simply refused to have anything to do with mediation.

They suggested mediation to try and resolve the issues between us [mother and daughter] but my daughter wasn't keen on this. I would have given it a go, as things how they were; I was tearing my hair out.

Parents are keen to be able to access mediation before the family reaches breaking point.

Before it reached two years of arguing, it would have been good to have someone to talk to about where it went wrong. It would be good for parents to have a counsellor to provide guidance regarding where they are going wrong and also for the parent to think and be honest about where they are going wrong. But if I'd had that, I might be able to have my son living under the same roof as me.

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND PARENTING

AGENCY CASE STUDY: RISE LEADERSHIP

RISE Leadership Programme: Hyde Housing Association and Hyde Plus, Stockwell

RISE Leadership is the first parent-led, community approach to parenting issues, run by parents for parents in Lambeth. Participants who previously were engaged in a parenting programme devised by In-Volve and piloted by the Metropolitan Housing Trust in Brixton, went on to establish their own organisation, RISE Leadership.

The RISE Leadership programme offers personal development opportunities for parents and finds that those taking part become more able to make a difference in their homes, communities and as residents. One of the immediate benefits for participants is the improved ability to ask their neighbours for help. The programme also impacts on parenting. By creating a local structure for support, parents have felt better able to understand their roles as parents and so to support their children. The programme helps parents to build their confidence in communicating and so helps parents prevent the crisis of homelessness.

“If [a young person] is old enough to act out and demand independence, they are old enough to hear [their parent’s] side of the story.” **(Maureen Anderson, founding member, RISE Leadership)**

In turn, this helps parents to listen to their teenagers and to let them know that “their opinions count, that they are respected and in turn they learn to trust and respect others and are able to make considered decisions for themselves”.

RISE Leadership first engages parents with the programme and then goes on to train them to

educate and support other groups of parents. In this way, it develops skills within the community and leaves them to grow in that environment. It is an innovative model which offers support for parents, improves communication within families and so can enable families to avoid crises including homelessness among their children.

Hyde Housing also became involved when it recognised that there was a need for family support work on its estates: while there were different youth work projects, there was nothing suitable for parents. In 2008, Hyde Housing commissioned In-Volve to run a 16-week programme in Lambeth.

In October 2008, RISE Leadership continued to seek funding to continue its work on estates in Lambeth, particularly the Metropolitan and Hyde estates, and to develop the project to run alongside other social housing providers.

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Maureen Anderson of RISE Leadership:

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Viv Ahmun of In-Volve: ahmun@in-volve.org.uk

AGENCY CASE STUDY: PARENTLINE PLUS

Parentline Plus provides parenting support through a national telephone advice line, websites www.parentlineplus.org.uk and www.gotateenager.org.uk and local projects.

In Bristol, Parentline Plus runs parenting groups and workshops and offers one-to-one assistance in response to the lack of structured, easily accessible support for parents of older children and teenagers.

Groups are run by parents who have received training and accreditation in Facilitating Parenting Education and so are well-placed to offer peer support. Parents learn listening skills to help them respond to young people's concerns, and assertiveness skills to help them set boundaries and feel more confident in their parenting.

By supporting parents of adolescents to be more confident and relaxed with their teenagers and to communicate more openly, the service works to prevent family crises which can lead to homelessness. Where there is a crisis and family breakdown, it redirects parents to services that provide specialist help.

Commissioned through the parenting strategy the work is funded through the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF); the Parenting Fund; Barclaycard; charitable trusts and Neighbourhood Renewal.

In 2007-08, 650 parents used the service which has four staff and sessional workers. They offer a range of services, some of which are based in the neighbourhood in which the service is based. The work is promoted through a wide range of organisations commonly used by parents, including GPs and solicitors, as well as statutory agencies. Common Assessment Framework panels are used to build up a greater awareness of their services and engage multi-agency working where possible.

Contact Safiyah Cooper, Senior Parent Support Coordinator, Parentline Plus, safc@parentlineplus.org.uk.

Just two parents have actually participated in parenting programmes but overall, 34% of parents would like to see parenting classes or groups available in future.

Then you could chat and get ideas off other people – that's worked for us, maybe that would work for you.

Interviewees who have not been to parenting groups have concerns about whether such groups would help and may be reluctant to discuss personal issues in a public forum.

I think you'd all just moan about your own kids and then just go away thinking the same anyway... I think it'd just become a complaining group...

You don't like to think that you've not done right by your children, nobody does.

For some, a more individual solution is more appropriate; in Gloucester for example, Parentline Plus is piloting a parenting support programme by telephone. Other parents find support through their GP services.

I see my GP every three weeks to get my medicine [for depression], so I can chat through the other issues about my daughter then.

Agencies consulted also recognise the need to overcome the perception that such programmes are critical of parents and suggest that we need to look at ways parents are already succeeding:

Rather than point at their weaknesses look at parents' potential.

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY LISA

Lisa has had mental health issues and behavioural problems since the age of four. Her mother and younger sister have often been subject to Lisa's mood swings and violent outbursts and have been struggling to cope. Lisa recently decided to go and live with her boyfriend in a very unstable relationship.

Lisa was referred to the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) by her primary school. Since then Lisa and her mother have worked with psychologists, Social Services, her GP and Lisa's school.

Following a particularly violent outburst as a teenager, Lisa was referred to CAMHS for a second time. The CAMHS worker suggested that Lisa's mother might be interested in taking part in a ten-week parenting programme. The programme offered opportunities to meet other parents for mutual support and provided information on parenting skills including setting boundaries, maintaining discipline, respecting parent and child's emotional needs and becoming a more confident and understanding parent. Lisa's mother was keen to try anything she could to help Lisa, so agreed to give the programme a go.

At first you all sit there and nobody speaks and then by the end of the ten weeks people became used to sharing with the group as they got to know each other and found it extremely beneficial. You had a break halfway through, so in that break you could actually chat and then you got back to what you'd come to do.

I liked being able to talk to other mums and dads and find out what they were going through. That was useful actually; because everybody was in... well, some were even in situations worse than us. It was nice to talk to other parents, because you don't really talk to your work friends about how bad things are, or your family, as you don't really want them to know... but at least there you can talk.

It's liberating because it makes you realise that you are important too, you're not just mum, you have your own dreams and ambitions.

Lisa's mother felt that she benefited more than parents for whom attendance was compulsory. She found though that the techniques she was taught were most appropriate for younger children and as Lisa got older their effectiveness seemed to decrease. However, she would do it again if she had the opportunity.

The most useful thing about [the parenting programme] was meeting other parents and knowing others were going through the same as you – or worse. I'd do it again if had the chance. Just having somewhere you could go for a cuppa and a chat.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

AGENCY CASE STUDY: BROMLEY SUPPORT AND RESETTLEMENT TEAM

London Borough of Bromley

Bromley's Support and Resettlement Team (SRT) is part of the council's Housing Options Team. Funded through Homelessness Services and Supporting People, Bromley's specialist Young People's Team works with 16- and 17-year-olds with housing needs as well as carrying out homelessness assessments for this group.

The team comprises six staff: an assessment officer; a homelessness officer; a clerical officer; two support and resettlement officers and a team leader.

The benefit of a multi-agency team is that it can offer both expertise in working with young people and an integrated approach within a broader framework. Accommodation is usually provided in supported lodgings.

The team aims to work with all 16- and 17-year-olds approaching the London Borough Bromley Homelessness service. The staff are skilled at working holistically with 16- and 17-year-olds and address a range of immediate needs while having easy referral routes to specialist agencies where needed.

The aim is to prevent homelessness by reconciling parents and young people where possible, providing opportunities for education, training or employment and, where appropriate, providing access to housing and with planned support.

This includes an independent local mediation provider, Children's Services and the Youth Offending Team (YOT) and the SRT refers all young people to Connexions. In addition, housing surgeries are held at Connexions on a weekly basis and bi-weekly at the YOT, enabling early intervention to prevent homelessness.

From October 2008, a new Adolescents Team has Social Workers to conduct interviews and initial assessments for all 16- and 17-year-olds who approach Bromley Council for housing. Staff members work closely with Children's Services where parents and young people present

with high needs, enabling a cross-department approach to delivering structured support.

Staff will seek to involve the whole family in finding solutions to the presenting crisis. This might involve asking the family for a period of time in which the young person can stay at home "while we all work out a planned move" or finding a temporary placement with other family members while the SRT arranges a planned move. Staff members find that simply "giving families breathing space" is very effective. Team Manager Seema Chote described how "just getting help and seeing that there is a way out" sometimes makes all the difference. Where it is needed, parenting support and advice about a range of issues is offered and families are directed to other services as appropriate.

**Contact Seema Chote, Team Manager,
Support and Resettlement Team,
seema.chote@bromley.gov.uk.**

Parents highlight a number of areas where support specifically for their children is needed:

Education, Employment and Training

Speaking about issues relating to young people's lifestyles, parents recognise how important it is that their children engage in learning or employment. One mother describes how her daughter lost her job when she was moving around from place to place.

You have to think about the relationship between having a place to live and a job – one doesn't go without the other. She [daughter] had a job on a trial period but sometimes she had to stay quite some distance from the job. Then because she didn't turn up every day she didn't pass the trial.

Others describe the stresses placed on the family when a young person is living at home, but not making any contribution:

He needs to move on and make a life for himself as an adult. I know life has not been easy for him but he must now shoulder the burden of adulthood and get a job and get on with life. Doing nothing all day can only lead to trouble.

Mental health and wellbeing

If you called [CAMHS], they would phone you back or come and see you straight away. They were approachable, easy to talk to and willing to help.

Several parents highlighted concerns over their teenager's mental health. While most describe the difficulties of coping alone, some have received counselling and a few have received support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and describe some of the positive contributions from and concerns about, this service.

The [CAMHS] Counsellor was good because she put her foot down... she stood up to [my daughter] more than others have done. But then she went on maternity leave and [my daughter] was passed to various other members of staff but didn't benefit as much... and then when she turned 16, it was hard to get help

The role of schools

[My daughter's] school provided her with help when she became homeless. She got quite a lot of help from them about where to go.

Parents have experience of working with schools regarding attendance, bullying or support needs. As a result, schools are seen by parents as being in a good position to take on an early diagnostic role, to notice changes in children and to work with parents to identify and resolve problems.

My granddaughter was offered counselling through her school... when her mum was heavily dependent on drug usage.

[My son] struggled to attend school over a long period of time... We worked closely with the school about this.

Parents and agencies recognise the pressures schools are under but both see schools as a springboard to stimulate the development of family support services.

It would have been better to have had more understanding from the school but they get so much pressure to get good statistics. It puts schools off having disruptive children in the class.

Youth activities

Parents are also clear about the importance of provision for all young people and particularly those facing difficulties. Several interviewees talked about young people needing activities and the consequences of not having such opportunities:

They should bring back youth clubs – even going to the cinema costs a fortune.

When I was young... you always knew you could go somewhere and you would be welcome and there'd be friends... and I think really and truly that's what the kids have lost now – I think that's why they get in these gangs and everything, because they're roaming about the streets and there is just nothing other than mischief to get up to.

[My son] needed to be out more, mixing with his peer group. He needed to be active and develop skills, not just be sitting at the computer... He seemed to spend more and more time on the computer at the same time as his behaviour was deteriorating.

Providing Suitable Accommodation

Young people have to be helped to get knowledge and life experience for themselves – in a sheltered environment, ideally at home – or find a safe way for them to do this outside of the home.

74% of respondents consider supported accommodation to be the most suitable for 16- and 17-year-olds who cannot live with their family.

Parents are clear that the decision no longer to accommodate their teenager is one not taken lightly. When it is offered, parents express how helpful access to alternative accommodation can be, both in relation to the immediate crisis and in helping them to sustain their relationships with their children.

I think if we'd have had to, sort of like, live under the same roof for any more length of time I think it just would have got worse and worse.

While many parents see supported accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds as a last resort, it is certainly the case that for some young people it is essential for their safety. 10% of the parents interviewed say that their child left because they had been subjected to violence within the home; this figure is likely to be underestimated as some interviewees will not have disclosed details of violence or abuse within the family. For these young people, supported accommodation offers a lifeline, in terms of both the accommodation – having somewhere safe to live – and the support tailored to their specific and often higher, level of need. Parents also discuss situations in which young people are at risk from others and suggest that accommodation away from their home area is needed.

Parents are clear that 16- and 17-year-olds living separately from their parents need somewhere with structured support and adult involvement and agree that bed & breakfast accommodation is not suitable.

When they are that age, they are just kids underneath, for all their wanting to be treated like adults.

SHORT-STAY ACCOMMODATION

AGENCY CASE STUDY: TIME OUT ACCOMMODATION SERVICE

London Borough of Lambeth Time Out Accommodation

Lambeth's Time Out Accommodation Service opened in March 2008. The core aim of the service is to improve relationships between young people and their families, so that they can either return home or rebuild the family relationship and continue to receive support if they move on to alternative accommodation. It has a dedicated mediation suite, 20 bedrooms and offers young people aged 16 and 17 in conflict with families a short break of 6 to 8 weeks away from home. During this time, each young person and their parent is offered mediation and young people are offered housing-related and life skills support. At the end of the stay, it is hoped that the young person will return home, with the offer of ongoing mediation provided for up to 6 months.

Jointly funded by the Lambeth Council Supporting People Team and the Housing Department, the Time Out Accommodation Service is managed by Lookahead Housing and Care who provide housing-related support with 24-hour staffing cover on site. Delivered in partnership with the Alone in London mediation service, a full-time mediation officer is based at the Time Out service. All referrals are from Lambeth Housing in-house Family Support Service and the Housing Service holds the housing management responsibility for the building.

Time Out provides a model of intervention which works holistically with the whole family. When a young person moves into the service, both the new resident and their parent signs an "Enabling Change Contract". This sets out the main issues that have been identified and need addressing, the structure of support that will be delivered and the house rules.

Mediation is compulsory; time-bound and has the intended outcome of family reconciliation and a return home. The delivery of mediation on site, in a building in which young people feel comfortable and by a person they know, is seen as one of the key success factors of this service.

**Contact Mike Bansback, Time Out,
mikebansback@lookahead.org.uk.**

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY CHRIS

Chris had a difficult childhood – his parents' marriage broke down when he was a baby, partly due to his father's drug addiction. Chris and his mother moved frequently and Chris found it difficult to settle in a new home and new school.

When Chris was 11, his mother started a new relationship and subsequently got married. Chris struggled with this and his relationship with his mother deteriorated. He began getting into minor trouble with the police, kept bad company and became involved in a gang who threatened him repeatedly.

As things at home continued to be difficult, Chris' aunt called the local authority and asked for help with housing him.

When we spoke with his mother Tom had been in emergency accommodation for two weeks, while the local authority assessed his needs. Mediation sessions had started and his mother feels that Chris has already begun to change.

Now he is beginning to realise – funnily enough, since he has been away from home... It's not so much his behaviour, it's his attitude. He seems to be more positive. He's been to Connexions and is talking about a plastering course in September with college. But it is early days yet so we are breathing very gently!

If support was given earlier and included a break here and there, families would not break down beyond repair.

36% of parents want short-term accommodation for their teenage children. Those who make use of some kind of respite, either formally or informally arranged, report that their relationships with their children improve when they live apart for a period of time. Parents discuss how having 'breathing space' enables parents and children to reassess their situations and relationships while a return home or elsewhere is negotiated. Parents talk about how frustrations can build up, leading to family breakdowns and homelessness for the young person.

If someone had listened to me, as a single mum finding it difficult to cope with a boy with special needs, if I'd had someone to talk to... Just a bit of respite care, someone to have him overnight every now and then would have helped.

Some parents arrange such respite accommodation themselves. Several children have experience of living with extended family and many parents think this is the best option for children living away from home:

If they can't live with their parents, ideally it would be best with that they stayed with close family such as grandparents or aunts, uncles.

Three parents have experience of schemes offering short-stay accommodation. At the time of the interviews one young person had returned home, one had moved on to suitable accommodation and the third was still living temporarily away from home.

These parents stress the importance for clarity regarding the scope of these arrangements so that families understand that the accommodation is short term and that the young person might return home after a brief period away.

Anecdotally, agencies report that a significant proportion of young people (particularly those under 18) do return to the family home after staying in supported accommodation.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS

If there is no extended family, there should be somewhere, someone that is checked... sensible people who have a lot of patience and who have got a big heart – lots of patience and lots of common sense.

Supported lodgings offer accommodation for young people within a family home. The young person has their own room and shares the kitchen and bathroom facilities with the family or householder for as little as one day, up to two years.

Supported lodgings schemes offering short-term accommodation are often used as a form of assessment and respite provision. This is becoming an increasingly common practice for local authority teams working with 16- and 17-year-olds.

42% of parents think that supported lodgings are a good option for 16- and 17-year-olds. None of the respondents have formal experience of supported lodgings, though, as one parent reflected, this option appeared to be similar to the way other family members had provided a place for her son to live.

Parents anticipate that, away from immediate family, their child would find it easier to follow boundaries set by lodgings providers. Many are realistic about the strengths of supported lodgings schemes and about their timeliness.

Supported lodgings might have made a difference... I think if she'd gone in one when she was 16... she wouldn't have left, got chucked out... it would be hard now though because [my daughter] is used to coming and going as she pleases, so it would be hard to get back into that family structure of rules and regulations.

SUPPORTED (HOSTEL) ACCOMMODATION

INDIVIDUAL CASE STUDY: TOM

Following the break-up of his parents' marriage when he was 15, Tom became increasingly withdrawn and aggressive.

At 16, Tom left college. He stayed at home a lot, playing on the computer and sleeping in late. He had little motivation and no routine in his life. Tom expected his mother to provide him with money to go out with his friends.

The crisis happened when Tom's mother went away for a weekend leaving Tom staying with friends. While she was away, Tom had a key to the house cut, let himself in and lied to her about it when she came home. He then threatened to damage the apartment when she confronted him about it.

He was growing apart from me, and was becoming someone I didn't recognise.

Tom, she felt, had become too much for her and she told him he had to leave. She found this to be a very difficult decision to make and says that had there been another alternative she would have taken it.

In an ideal world I would've like to have seen Tom... still being at home and me not having to make that decision to force him out of the family home. I would've liked to have him go of his own accord when he was ready to go rather than have this situation where I have had to make him go.

Initially Tom went to the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) for help. The CAB gave him the telephone number for Social Services who in turn referred him on to the Housing Department and finally to the YMCA's Step-In project.

The YMCA worker helped Tom and his mother discuss their options and together they decided Tom and his mother should live apart. Tom was supported in applying for a place in a local supported housing project.

It was a safer option for me because I knew that Tom would be in a secure... place where it was manned... I wanted the best for Tom and I didn't want to just chuck him out on the streets and forget about him and disown him. I think he needed that to stand on his own two feet.

Since Tom moved out of home, everything has changed. His relationship with his mother has improved. They are talking again and once a week, they meet for dinner.

He's a totally different boy now that he's independent. He has realised now that living on your own and having to budget your money isn't easy. He didn't know the value of what it cost to run a property and I think the reality of having his own place has made him understand.

Supported accommodation gives young people the chance to see what it would be like to live on their own and to learn to do things for themselves.

When they are no longer able to live with their children, 62% of parents say they value the opportunities provided by semi-independent accommodation such as YMCAs and other foyers and hostels. In these settings, their child has the support of adults while living alongside their peers and learning how to live independently.

For some, the benefit of supported accommodation is that it provides an environment for learning life skills:

In [my daughters] case, being pregnant and having a baby, she needs to have a place where there is good support and training on how to look after a baby, as she doesn't have a clue yet about cooking or being independent, let alone looking after someone else.

Parents believe that learning to manage peer relationships is a key aspect of growing up and say that accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds needs to have staff on-site and overnight, to assist young people with managing visitors. This would help young people to feel secure and to learn how to manage boundaries. One parent thought this would offer:

Somewhere where she feels safe.

Conclusions

Housing is often only one of many issues young people and their families have to deal with. By the time their child reaches 16 years old, families may have been managing their difficulties for several years and have usually tried a number of ways to resolve them. A decision to live apart is often a last resort, and the contributing problems then become hidden behind the crisis of homelessness.

Parents hope that living apart will prove to be a better option than continuing to cope with the difficulties of living together. However, all too often, while leaving home has the potential to solve some of the issues, homelessness itself leads to additional struggles.

In response to the needs of families and communities, the structure of available services needs to be readdressed using a multi-faceted approach, making better use of available resources. Many of the ideas which have been contributed to this report offer realistic solutions to the problems faced by parents and young people. Parents want a change in the process of service delivery as much as its outcomes and often their concerns focus on how services are delivered.

Parents and agencies agree that earlier and easier access to services is imperative to prevent homelessness among 16- and 17-year-olds. From the parents' perspective, schools and youth services have a key role to play. For local housing authorities this raises the need to work in partnership with Children's Services.

Early access to services is hampered by a lack of information and a perceived stigma attached to requesting help. Information and advice needs to be available to parents in places that families visit as part of their daily routines if parents are to make best use of homelessness prevention and other advice services.

Parenting programmes have not yet had a significant impact on the families consulted and agencies report that the emphasis on parenting skills has tended to be on parents of younger children. Such programmes have the potential to provide significant support for parents, and this issues needs to be explored further. In order to be truly effective, parent support needs to become as universal as antenatal support.

The relationship that young people have with their parents is critical and needs to be taken into account in order for young people to avoid potential crises. Extended families play a particular role in providing support and accommodation. There may be significant gains to be made for young people and families if their role is better recognised and information and resources provided.

Family support (including mediation and counselling) has a role to play in supporting family communication and providing an outside perspective. Homelessness mediation has a higher success rate in keeping communication open, than in preventing homelessness directly: by the time they reach this point, families are often in real crisis. Earlier intervention would be more preventative. There is potential for joint commissioning family support and mediation services with Children's Services.

Parents of 16- and 17-year-olds retain a strong relationship with their child's school, whether or not that relationship is positive. Schools often play a leading role in working with parents to manage their child's problems and behaviour and are seen as a valuable arena for support and prevention work.

Local authorities and their partners have responded to an increased demand for accommodation to meet the particular needs of 16- and 17-year-olds by developing a range of accommodation options for young people who cannot live with their parents.

There is scope for developing accommodation with the capacity for planned short-term stays further. By building in breaks for families, such respite has the potential to sustain families in the long term. In order to make such flexible accommodation available, financial barriers must be removed.

Integrated accommodation and mediation services provide separation for both adults and young people while building bridges between them.

Young people at risk from others need support to stay safe and may need secure accommodation away from their home area, as has been developed for women escaping domestic violence. For this to be workable, boroughs would need to develop joint protocols and joint working practices to manage such referrals and housing providers would have to be included to ensure the provision of appropriate accommodation.

Overall, parents remain positive concerning the available options that would enable their young people to make transitions from the family home to independence at the appropriate time. They are realistic about their young people's support needs and see supported accommodation as a last resort, when it becomes impossible for young people to stay at home. Further research may help to better understand the protective factors involved in families who successfully manage teenagers' transitions to independence.

Parents and extended family members play a key role in supporting and accommodating vulnerable young people. The significance of their contribution and their views on what works must be recognised when planning and delivering services if we are to prevent homelessness and pave the way for better outcomes for young people.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this report, YMCA England recommends that the following be adopted by relevant policy makers, commissioners and service providers:

- 1** Increased financial investment in family support schemes (including mediation and counselling) which serve to intervene at all relevant stages of upbringing and not only at crisis points.
- 2** The introduction of support programmes for families with teenagers at risk of homelessness, to be incorporated into established services such as health, youth services and schools.
- 3** The adaptation of existing parenting strategies and programmes to better respond to families with teenagers, including the potential initiation of peer support.
- 4** Increased availability of information and service access-points in community, educational and health settings, to enable parents to find help earlier.
- 5** The provision of clear, accurate and timely information about what services are available to young people and families, along with details of how to access them.
- 6** The development and implementation of holistic assessments and integrated services, which recognise that teenage homelessness is often symptomatic of a wider collection of issues causing families to break down. The Common Assessment Framework and Targeted Youth Support reforms that are currently underway represent an opportunity for this.
- 7** The adoption of service models which build on families' desire to explore problems, identify relevant competencies and skills areas and work proactively towards effective solutions.
- 8** Increased information-sharing and the removal of financial barriers to strengthen and sustain the role played by immediate and extended families in providing support, care and accommodation for teenagers at risk.
- 9** Increased flexibility in the approach of supported accommodation, which recognises the specific needs of 16- and 17-year-olds who need accommodation for short periods of time, with repeated use expected as part of growing up.
- 10** Increased access to suitable accommodation for 16- and 17-year-olds with accompanying adult support to provide guidance and to ensure young people remain safe.
- 11** An ongoing family focus for young people while in supported accommodation.
- 12** The increased involvement of young people and families in decision-making processes, ensuring that services are tailored towards their specific needs.

Appendix: Parenting Questionnaire

1. How old was your child when s/he first left home?

2. What was the main reason s/he left?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Old enough to manage on their own | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents moving | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with neighbours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Not enough space | <input type="checkbox"/> To find a job, go to college, school or training | <input type="checkbox"/> Drug/alcohol use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviour issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Becoming a parent or pregnant | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Money issues | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) | | |
-

3. Who has helped you with your child's housing needs? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family | <input type="checkbox"/> GP | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing advice (council) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other parents | <input type="checkbox"/> School | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing advice (other) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The YMCA | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth services | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting class | <input type="checkbox"/> I have not had any help | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) | | |
-

4. Who was the most helpful to you?

5. What was it that made it particularly helpful to you? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible opening times | <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to get to | <input type="checkbox"/> Welcoming staff |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quick appointments | <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits | <input type="checkbox"/> Good advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clear information | <input type="checkbox"/> Helped us to live together | <input type="checkbox"/> Helped us find accommodation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) | | |
-

6. What happened as a result? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> My child remained in the family home | <input type="checkbox"/> My child found a suitable place to live | <input type="checkbox"/> Our family was able to get other help |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Our family knew more about housing options | <input type="checkbox"/> Things got better in our family | <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing changed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) | | |
-

7. What would improve these services? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Longer opening hours | <input type="checkbox"/> Earlier help (before a crisis happens) | <input type="checkbox"/> Short-term accommodation in a crisis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quicker to get an appointment | <input type="checkbox"/> Home visits | <input type="checkbox"/> Good advice |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better information about housing options | <input type="checkbox"/> More welcoming staff | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easier access to other services | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please state) | | |
-

8. Do you think extra help could prevent families breaking down and a young person from leaving home?

- Yes No

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