

Young & Homeless 2015

Our annual Young & Homeless report explores the reasons young people become homeless, the support available to them, and areas that need to be improved.

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Produced by

Policy and Research Team

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the National Youth Reference Group, and our interviewees for their help and assistance with this report. We are also grateful to the local authorities and homelessness providers who responded to the survey, and in particular St Basil's, Harrow Churches Housing Association, New Horizons, Step by Step and YMCA West London.

Key findings

Young people are now the most likely group to be living in poverty.¹ Whilst youth unemployment is at its lowest level since the recession, this is still over three times the rate of the older adult working age population.² Young people have been adversely impacted by changes to the welfare system, there are increasing challenges to accessing affordable and suitable housing, and there have been significant cuts to youth services in the past five years. Based on the experiences young people shared with us, it is now more and more difficult for young people to access the temporary help they need if things go wrong. Nearly half of people living in homeless accommodation services are aged between 16 and 24³ and without adequate support or early intervention, homelessness can go on to impact education, employment, health and wellbeing and is more likely to lead to homelessness in older age.

Our fifth annual report on youth homelessness focuses on young people accessing both local authorities and voluntary sector providers. It explores who is becoming homeless and the reasons for this, and the provision of homelessness prevention and support services available to young people. It goes on to examine the accommodation options young people have at the point of crisis, and longer term move-on from homelessness services. The research is based on two surveys administered to providers of homelessness services and local authorities in September 2015, as well as fourteen interviews with young people living in homelessness services.

Scale and profile of youth homelessness

- There is a contrast between the scale of youth homelessness reported by homelessness providers and local authorities. Providers report seeing more young people who are homeless (68% reported an increase) whereas local authorities report seeing fewer young people (20% of people presenting as homeless were under-25, compared to 31% last year).
- These changes support evidence from elsewhere which suggests that declines in official statutory homelessness may have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness.⁴ One explanation is that fewer young people are approaching their local authority for support and are approaching providers, or that young people are being signposted to providers as part of their local authority's advice or prevention.
- Parents or carers no longer willing to accommodate continues to be the leading cause of youth homelessness, a causal factor in nearly half of cases (47%) compared to 36% in 2014.
- A large proportion of young people in homelessness services are aged 18-21 and non-care leavers (44%), and would be potentially affected by the proposed changes to end automatic entitlement for housing support for those aged 18-21.
- The proportion of young women in homelessness services was higher than previous years at 46%, compared to 40% in 2014.

¹ Tom MacInnes, Adam Tinson, Ceri Hughes, Theo Barry Born and Hannah Aldridge (2015) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2015, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and New Policy Institute: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/mpse-2015>

² Office for national Statistics, Statistical bulletin: UK Labour Market, November 2015

³ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

⁴ Watts, B., Johnsen, S. and Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Review for The OVO Foundation, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University <https://ihurerblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/youth-homelessness-in-the-uk.pdf>

- Despite being homeless, large proportions of young people (65%) are studying, employed or on a work/apprenticeship scheme, including 22% of young people in paid employment.
- The proportion of young people sleeping rough has decreased slightly – 17% had ever slept rough compared to 19% in 2014.

Joint working and provision of prevention services

- Compared to 2014, both local authorities and providers were more likely to report the use of a Positive Pathway⁵ – 64% of local authorities and 78% of providers report there is a Positive Pathway in their area. This has increased from 49% and 48% respectively last year.
- The proportion of cases where youth homelessness was prevented or relieved increased to 23%, up from 19% last year.
- The availability of prevention tools remained steady for local authorities, but four in ten (42%) still report they do not have an adequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness.
- There are signs of improvement in joint working between Housing and Children’s Services – 64% report that joint working is ‘very effective’ or ‘effective’ which has increased from 58% in 2014.

Accommodation options and support

- Young people without recourse to public funds or without a local connection are finding it increasingly difficult to access support as they are more likely to be turned away by services. This year 57% of services turned away young people because they had no recourse to public funds (compared to 24% last year) and young people with no local connection were turned away by 40% of services (compared to 25% last year).
- There is a lack of youth appropriate emergency accommodation in many areas – half of areas (49%) do not have Nightstop or a similar scheme, 43% do not have a youth specific assessment centre or short stay supported accommodation.
- Local authorities are more likely to have provision of longer term supported housing options for young people compared to emergency accommodation. However there have been some reductions; 29% of areas report that hostels and foyers are either not available or there is less availability and 34% of local authorities report the same for shared housing with floating support.
- Bed and Breakfast usage for 16 and 17 year olds does not occur in 41% of local authorities. Yet 59% of local authorities still report rarely or occasionally using B&Bs for this age group.
- Whilst slightly lower than last year, 55% of young people living in homelessness accommodation have complex needs and 34% have mental health issues (an increase from 23% in 2014).
- Homelessness providers continue to provide a range of support services for young people. There has been an increase in the proportion of providers offering mediation services - 73% compared to 41% in 2014.

Move on and access to long term accommodation

- Homelessness providers report that on average young people spend 16 months in homelessness organisations before they move on, nearly double the length of time in 2014.

⁵ The Positive Pathway⁵ is the result of research and consultations undertaken with charities, organisations and young people by St Basils in 2012 and updated in 2015. See <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/how-we-help/positive-pathway/>

- The most common outcome for young people leaving homelessness providers is the private rented sector (28%). Returning home to family or friends is now the least common outcome for young people leaving homelessness organisations – one in twenty (5%) providers reported this is the most common outcome compared to one in four last year.
- Schemes to assist access to the private rented sector varied. Local authorities report that availability of shared accommodation options developed with private landlords and relationships developed with private landlords to let to young people has decreased. The availability of rent deposit or cashless bond schemes has stayed fairly constant (87% of local authorities have one).
- Sanctions, changes to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) and reductions in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) continue to have a negative impact on young people's ability to access accommodation; providers were more likely than local authorities to report young people are impacted 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit'.

Introduction

Background

Young people continue to make up nearly half of people accessing homeless accommodation services⁶. As one of the most vulnerable groups in society without the right support, homelessness can have a serious impact on young people's lives. Experience of homelessness at a young age is proven to increase the risk of becoming homeless again and developing complex problems in later life.⁷

The scale of youth homelessness is difficult to quantify, as many young people who are homeless are not counted in official statistics. Government data only counts the number of young people who have approached their local authority for assistance and have a full homelessness duty accepted. Despite increases in prevention work, youth homelessness remains a significant concern. Recent research into the scale of youth homelessness has shown that it has remained steady, or possibly increased in recent years, with concerning levels of rough sleeping and sofa surfing reported by young people.⁸ These findings have emerged in contrast to trends in statutory youth homelessness, which has been declining over a number of years.

In 2014/15 13,490 young people aged between 16 and 24 had a homelessness duty accepted, accounting for a quarter of all acceptances.⁹ Estimates by Centrepoin indicate that approximately 130,000 young people a year in England ask their local authority for help because they are homeless or at risk of homelessness.¹⁰ There are other reasons levels of youth homelessness are difficult to quantify, some people will stay temporarily with family and friends or may be living in unsafe situations which are undocumented. Outside of London the age of rough sleepers is not recorded, but since 2009/10 the number of rough sleepers aged between 18 and 24 in London has doubled, accounting for 12% of the total number.¹¹

There have been a number of investment programmes aimed at young people in the past 12 months. The Fair Chance Fund, a £15 million funding stream administered through the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and Cabinet Office aims to help young people with complex needs to access and sustain accommodation, education, training and employment. Platform for Life is a Department of Health and DCLG programme to provide shared accommodation options for

⁶ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review

<http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

⁷ Mackie, P. and Thomas, I (2014) Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain:

<http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/NationsApart.pdf>

⁸ Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S. and Udagawa, C. (2015) Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge:

<http://www.centrepoin.org.uk/media/1522377/Cambridge%20full%20report%20-%20scale%20of%20youth%20homelessness.pdf>

⁹ DCLG, Table 781: Age of applicants, Homeless households in priority need accepted by local authorities by age of applicant, England, 2005 Q2 to 2015 Q2:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/463064/Statutory_Homelessness_Live_Tables_201506.xlsx

¹⁰ Centrepoin (2015) Youth Homelessness Databank: Beyond Statutory Homelessness:

http://centrepoin.org.uk/media/1690269/0054_yhd_report_full_v12.pdf

¹¹ St Mungo's Broadway (2010) Street to Home Annual Report 1st April 2009 to 31st March 2010:

<http://www.mungosbroadway.org.uk/documents/15565>

Greater London Authority and St Mungo's Broadway (2015) CHAIN Annual Bulletin Greater London 2014/15:

<https://files.datapress.com/london/dataset/chain-reports/CHAIN%20Greater%20London%20bulletin%202014-15.pdf>

young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or in housing need, to support them into training and education and link them into existing health services.

Nonetheless, these programmes are set against a backdrop of current and proposed welfare changes which have disproportionately affected young people, continued pressure in the housing market where young people's housing options are limited, and reductions in funding for youth services. Youth services have seen significant cut backs in recent years as part of a wider reduction in statutory services to reduce the deficit. Unison estimates that between 2012 and 2014 youth services lost at least £60 million of funding which includes the closure of youth centres and youth outreach work.¹² Within the homelessness sector there has been a decrease of over 7,000 bedspaces in homeless accommodation projects in England since 2010, many of which provide emergency and longer term supported accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness.¹³

Implemented welfare changes include the extension of the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) to people under-35, and the increase in benefit conditionality and intensified application of sanctions in the welfare system. Research has found that young people are at far greater risk of having their benefits sanctioned than older Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) claimants.¹⁴ Studies across England have shown that very limited proportions of the housing market are affordable at the SAR.¹⁵ When landlord's willingness to let to benefit claimants was taken into account one study found that less than 2% of the housing market was accessible to under-35s on Local Housing Allowance (LHA).¹⁶

In the 2015 Summer Budget the government announced it was planning to remove the automatic entitlement to the housing costs element of Universal Credit from 18 to 21 year old claimants from April 2017 onwards. Whilst the intention behind the change is to prevent young people from going straight from school to benefits, the evidence shows that nearly three quarters of 18 to 21 year olds who access JSA do so for less than six months.¹⁷ Early estimates demonstrate that the removal of Housing Benefit (HB) would only save 0.4% of the total annual benefit expenditure in 2014/15.¹⁸ For those 18 to 21 year olds who are claiming JSA and HB this is down to necessity rather than choice, including those experiencing homelessness and living in supported accommodation.

Another change will be the introduction of the 'Youth Obligation' where, from April 2017, 18 to 21 year olds will be subjected to an intense activity programme from day one of claiming JSA. Whilst there has been a drop in youth unemployment over the past year young people are over three times more likely to be unemployed (14% of young adults are unemployed)¹⁹ and five times more likely to be on zero hours contracts than older people.²⁰ Even if young people are able to access employment or training

¹² Unison (2014) The UK's youth services how cuts are removing opportunities for young people and damaging their lives <https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2014/07/On-line-Catalogue225322.pdf>

¹³ Based on data collected through the Homeless UK database between 2010 and 2015.

¹⁴ Watts, B., Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., & Watkins, D. (2014). Welfare conditionality and sanctions in the UK. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Beatty, C., Foden, M., McCarthy, L., & Reeve, K. (2015). Benefit sanctions and homelessness: a scoping report. London: Crisis.

¹⁵ Homeless Link (2013), *Nowhere to Move* http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/attached-downloads/No%20Where%20To%20Move_FINAL.pdf

¹⁶ Crisis (2012) No room available: study on the availability of shared accommodation: <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/1212%20No%20room%20available.pdf>

¹⁷ YMCA (2015) Uncertain Futures: A report examining the impact of removing automatic entitlement to housing benefit for 18 to 21 year olds: <http://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Uncertain-Futures-Final-Web-version.pdf>

¹⁸ Cole, I. and Reeve, K (2015) The withdrawal of support for housing costs under Universal Credit for young people: more pain for little gain? <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Housing%20costs%2018-21%20removal%20FINAL.pdf>

¹⁹ Office for national Statistics, Statistical bulletin: UK Labour Market, November 2015

²⁰ Tom MacInnes, Adam Tinson, Ceri Hughes, Theo Barry Born and Hannah Aldridge (2015) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2015, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and New Policy Institute: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/mpse-2015>

they are more likely to be worse off than older households. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation poverty and social exclusion monitor shows the mix of those experiencing poverty has changed, with a shift towards younger working people living in the private rented sector.²¹ Young adults (aged 16 to 24) now have the highest poverty rate of all adults, with 34% of 16 to 19 year olds living in poverty.²²

Our fifth annual report on youth homelessness focuses on young people accessing both local authorities and voluntary sector providers. It explores who is becoming homeless and the reasons for this, the provision of homelessness prevention and support services available to you people. It goes on to examine the accommodation options young people have at the point of crisis, and longer term move on from homelessness services.

What is the Positive Pathway?

This year's report considers the findings within the framework of the Positive Pathway model (see Figure 1).²³ The Positive Pathway brings together evidence of good practice and 'what works' in youth homelessness to develop a pathway outlining how agencies should work together in an integrated way to prevent youth homelessness wherever possible, and support young people who are unable to remain in the family home. The pathway focuses not only on accommodation but on the range of needs young people require support with, in order to avoid becoming homeless or to move out of homelessness.

Although routes into and out of homelessness are not linear, the pathway reflects the typical route that many young people take. This initially entails being 'at risk' where associated problems such as truancy and tensions at home manifest. Young people may then reach crisis point when homelessness occurs, followed by their experiences of homelessness and various types of accommodation. If successfully supported, young people may then move forward into more independent living, or be able to return to the family home. The pathway provides a blueprint for how services should work together as young people navigate this journey, but variations of the pathway may exist in many areas. What is critical is an agreed strategy on prevention and provision at a local level, with the appropriate access to services required to operationalise the pathway. The pathway consists of five steps outlined on page 9.

Methodology

This is the fifth Young and Homeless report. The findings are based on two online surveys conducted with local authority housing departments and voluntary sector homelessness providers.

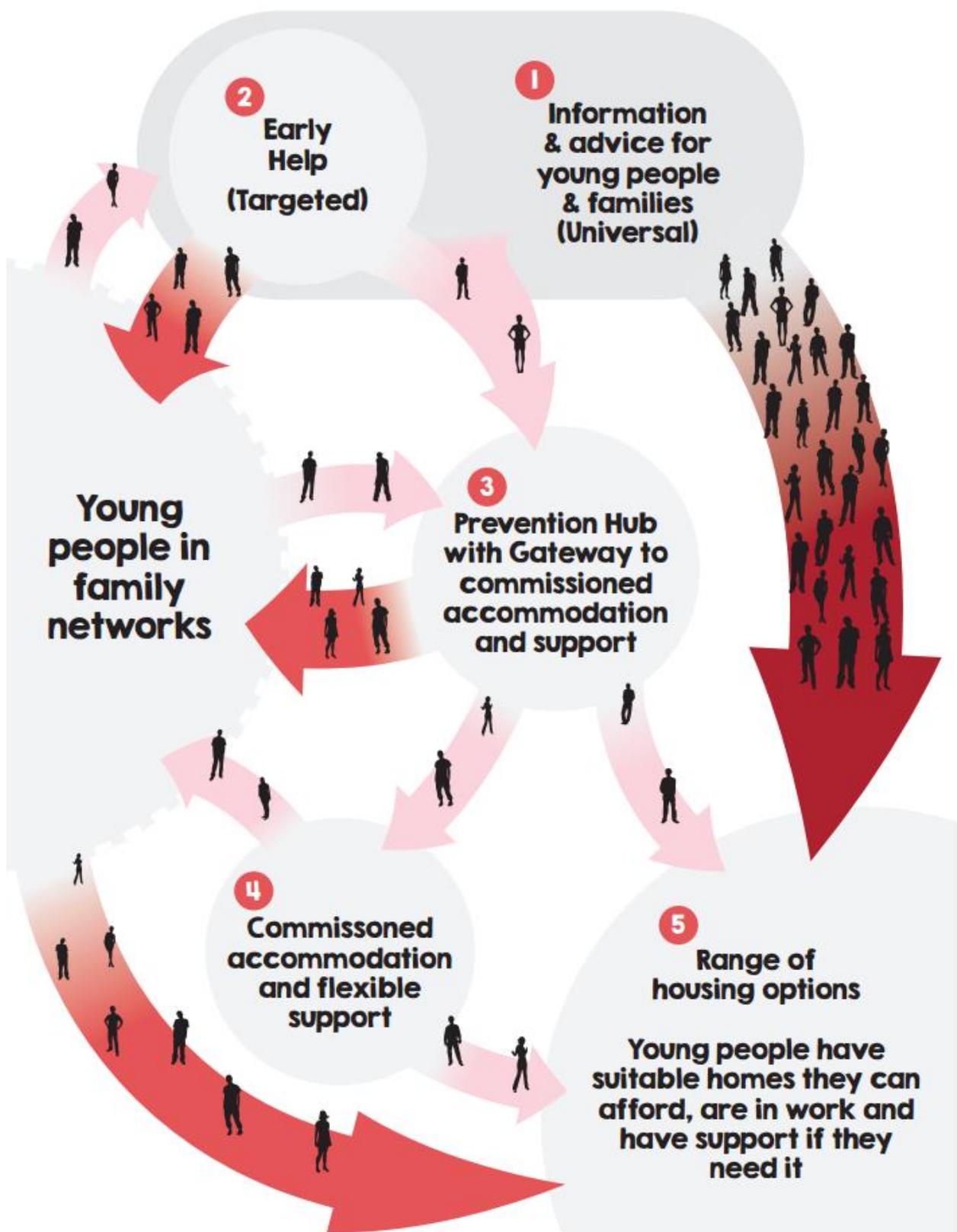
In total, we received 257 usable responses from both surveys; 170 usable responses from providers of homelessness services and 87 usable responses from local authorities. This represents response rates of 23% and 27% respectively. Fourteen interviews were conducted with young people who have experienced homelessness from four homelessness services. For the full methodology and limitations of the data please see appendices one and two.

²¹ Tom MacInnes, Adam Tinson, Ceri Hughes, Theo Barry Born and Hannah Aldridge (2015) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2015, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and New Policy Institute: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/mpse-2015>

²² Ibid

²³ The Positive Pathway' is the result of research and consultations undertaken with charities, organisations and young people by St Basils in 2012, and updated 2015. See <http://www.stbasils.org.uk/how-we-help/positive-pathway/>

Figure 1: The Positive Pathway



Source: St Basil's, http://www.stbasils.org.uk/files/2015-08-35/10_FINAL_pathwaysA4_booklet_98812.pdf

Findings

Chapter 1: Preventing homelessness

- Compared to 2014, both local authorities and providers were more likely to report a Positive Pathway in place – 64% of local authorities and 78% of providers report there is one in their area. This has increased from 49% and 48% respectively last year.
- The proportion of cases where youth homelessness was prevented or relieved increased to 23%, up from 19% last year.
- The availability of prevention tools remained steady for local authorities, but four in ten (42%) still report they do not have an adequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness.
- There are signs of improvement in joint working between Housing and Children's Services – 64% report that joint working is 'very effective' or 'effective'.

Preventing youth homelessness starts with a framework or agreement between organisations in a local area which outlines clearly the support that young people are entitled to at each step of the way, such as a Positive Pathway. A key step on the pathway involves reducing the risk of homelessness through education and early intervention, with a range of targeted support available for young people at risk of homelessness, before they reach crisis point.

For many people who become homeless or are at risk of homelessness, the local authority may be the first port of call. Many local authorities carry out prevention work to help people avoid homelessness where possible, or have their homelessness relieved.²⁴ This can include cases where a person is at risk, or where a statutory duty is not owed. Various tools and initiatives can be used to prevent youth homelessness including family mediation, education and advice on accommodation options.

Another key aspect of the Positive Pathway is joint-working/commissioning between Housing and Children's Services to provide a 'single integrated service gateway' to offer young people assessment, advice and access to accommodation. This follows from the *G v Southwark* judgment in 2009 which clarified that the Children Act 1989 takes precedence over duties under homelessness legislation in the case of homeless 16 and 17 year olds as they are still children.

This year's findings provide an updated picture of the prevention activity provided at a local level to young people in housing need. The findings relate to data collected by local authorities and providers in August 2015. Where possible, they are compared with the findings from August 2014 last year.

Integrating services through a Positive Pathway

This year, both local authorities (LAs) and providers were more likely to report that there is a Positive Pathway in place in their area. Of the 64% of local authorities reporting a pathway, 39% stated that it is currently in use, with 25% reporting it is being developed. This compares to 49% in total last year. Of the 78% of providers reporting a pathway, 70% said the pathway was in use, with the remaining 8% reporting it is being developed, an increase from 48% in 2014.

²⁴ Prevention occurs when someone avoids homelessness and is assisted to obtain alternative accommodation or to remain in their existing home. Relief occurs when the authority is unable to prevent homelessness but helps someone to secure accommodation even though they are under no obligation to do so.

Identifying and supporting those at risk

Results from the local authority survey show that prevention for young people increased slightly. This year, 23% of young people who approached their council had their homelessness prevented, compared to 19% last year. It is not possible to compare these figures to national figures for all age groups, as published statistics are not available on the proportion of people who approach their local authority for help who have their homelessness prevented or relieved.

The availability of prevention tools did not change notably from last year, although there was a small reduction in the proportion of local authorities that say they offer home visiting and mediation services (88% and 70%, down from 92% and 77% respectively), (Graph 1). Education work in schools or other kinds of youth provision remains the least commonly cited prevention tool used by local authorities, yet education forms the first step on the Positive Pathway framework. The reported decrease in mediation and home visiting is also disappointing, particularly as relationship breakdown with family is known to be the biggest cause of youth homelessness, with mediation and conciliation cited in last year's report²⁵ as one of the most effective forms of prevention. As in last year's survey, respondents to the local authority survey repeatedly cited mediation as one of the most effective means of preventing youth homelessness in the past year.

[On what works] Mediation between young person and family. Multi agency meetings including family and young person.

Respondent to local authority survey

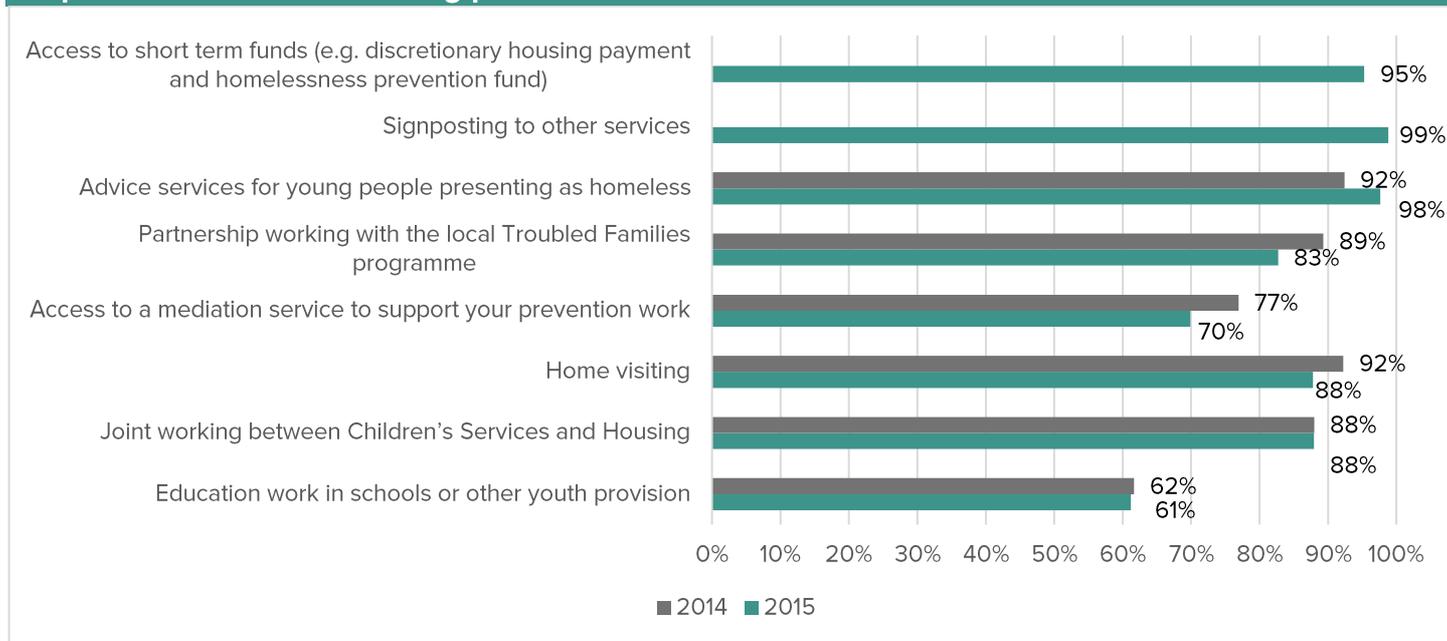
Prevention is better than cure. Education in schools and family with support to prevent a crisis [is needed].

Respondent to provider survey

Local authorities were asked for the first time whether they signpost to other services and whether they have access to short term funds to assist with homelessness prevention activity, with large proportions confirming that they do (99% and 95% respectively). There was also an increase in the proportion offering advice services (98%, up from 92%). Case study 1 shows an example of how one local authority in partnership with its Connexions service has used an education, employment and training programme to help prevent levels of youth homelessness in the local area. In case study 2, the local authority implements outreach work in schools to proactively identify young people at risk of homelessness in their area.

²⁵ Homeless Link (2014) Young and Homeless 2014: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/201411%20-%20Young%20and%20Homeless%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf>

Graph 1: Which of the following prevention initiatives are available?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=86
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: LAs: N=79

Whilst a range of prevention services exist, more than four in ten (42%) local authorities reported that they did not have an adequate range of tools to prevent youth homelessness — similar to the 40% reported last year. Correspondingly, three quarters of local authorities reported that there was no change since August 2014 in the availability of their prevention services, with small proportions reporting either an increase or decrease (Graph 2). By contrast, authorities were twice as likely to report a decrease in the availability of prevention services available through the voluntary sector (26% reported a decrease).

Case study 1: Using education, employment and training to prevent youth homelessness

Trafford Council piloted an employment, education and training (EET) programme with 16 and 17 year olds who were at serious risk of homelessness. The 'Activity Agreement' was run by the Council's children and young people's services, who identified young people at risk of homelessness through the Connexions service, youth offending team, children's services and family support services. Young people were only identified where it was safe for them to remain in the parental/family home.

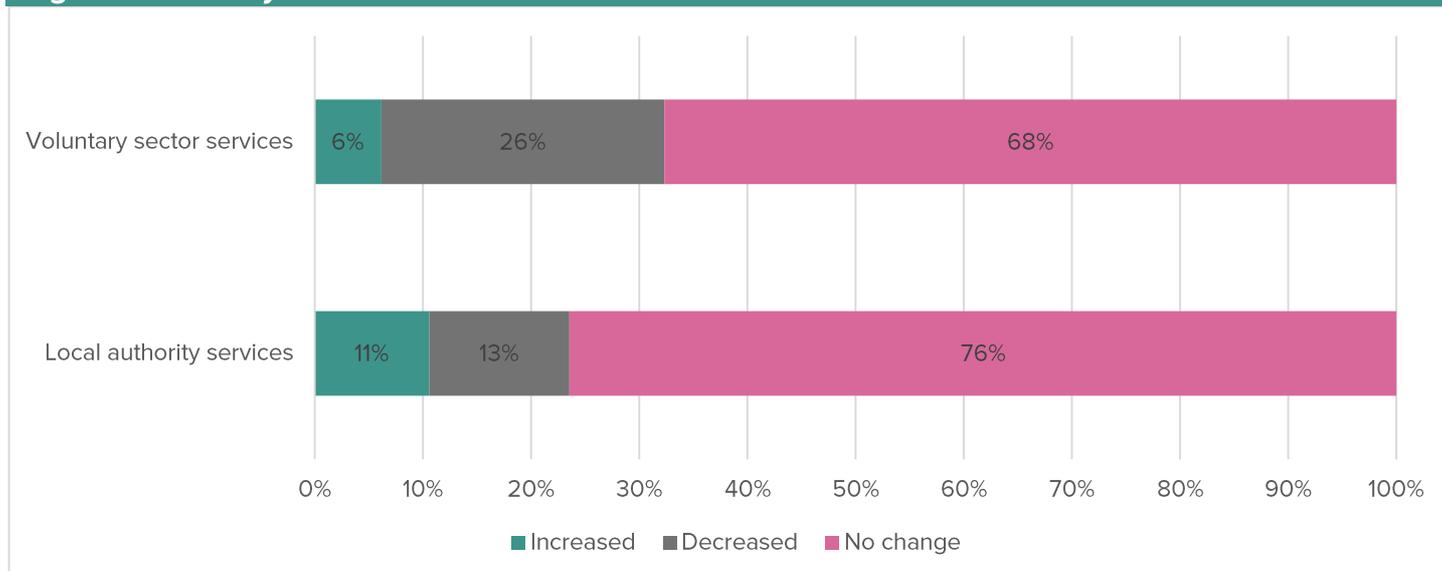
At the point the young person was about to leave the family home an initial conversation was set up with the parents and the young person about taking part in the 'Activity Agreement'. Young people and parents/carers were then paid an allowance of £20 per week for up to 20 weeks (average was 13 weeks). Over this period a Connexions Adviser supported the young person and the family and the young person took part in bespoke activities in order to support their retention or movement into EET. Young people were paid in arrears and only if they participated. They were also given a personal budget to spend on activities and resources of £200-£400 each which could be spent on anything that would support their progress to EET.

The programme was designed to address financial stress experienced by the family, low confidence and lack of motivation by the young person, and challenging behaviour such as substance misuse and

risk of offending. It aimed to sustain EET and prevent homelessness. Central to the programme was the relationship developed between the young person and their trained Connexions advisor.

The programme showed positive outcomes both in terms of engaging with EET but also in reducing homelessness. Between 2013/14 85% of young people that took part in the programme had an EET destination. There was also a reduction in the number of 16 and 17 year olds being placed in supported accommodation through Sections 17 or 20 of the Children Act 1989. Based on a caseload of 28 young people taking part in the programme, with an assumption that 50% would have required accommodation and minimal aftercare without the activity agreement taking place, the annual savings were estimated to be £120,461.

Graph 2: Has the availability of prevention services for young people in your area changed since August 2014 last year?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=86

The increase in the proportion of young people who had their homelessness prevented or relieved is an encouraging sign and suggests progress is being made. However, it still remains the case that a large proportion of young people who are not owed a statutory duty will not have their homelessness prevented or relieved. Being turned away by the local authority continues to be a common theme in interviews with young people who often report receiving no support at all if they are not in priority need.

The council could have been more helpful, the people around me could have been more helpful. Of course due to my age I am not a priority so with them telling me there is nothing they can do for me, it's hard to find someone who can help someone my age, who's not really vulnerable in their eyes even though I was.

Young person 4, service 3

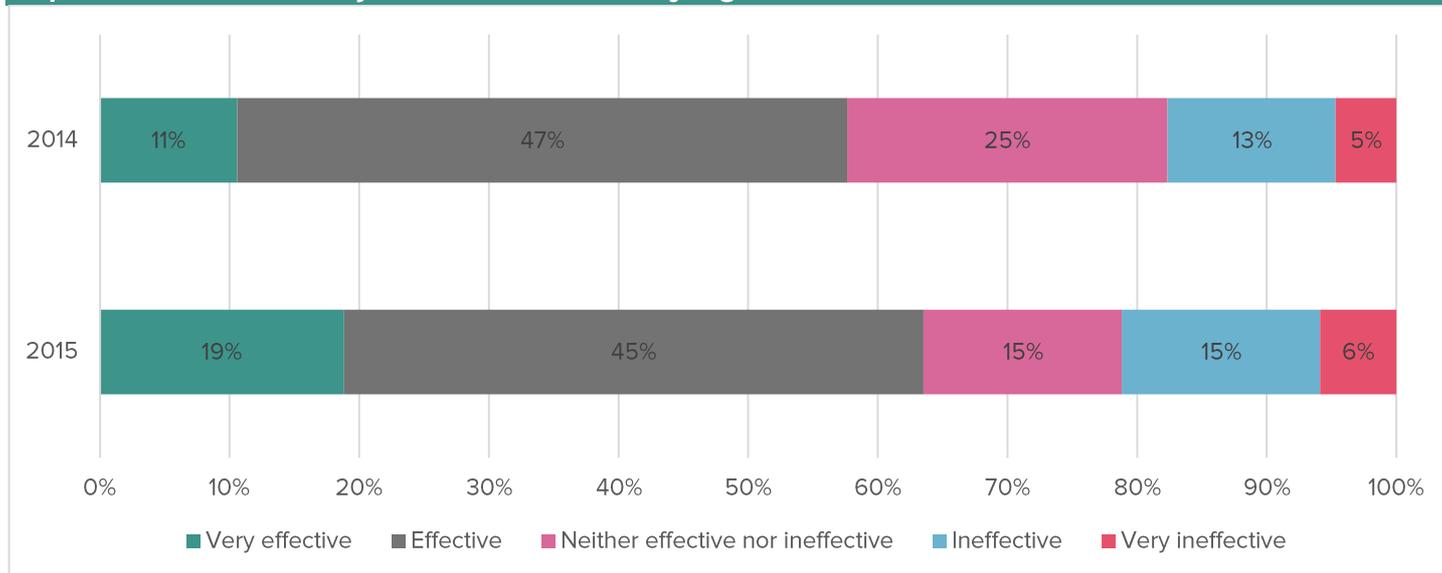
Funnily enough I went to the council, the local council because I didn't know anything about how to get a room and they said they can't help me, they only help people that are pregnant and over 35. So there was no hope there either.

Young person 1, service 2

Joint working

The majority of local authorities reported that they have a protocol in place between Housing and Children's Services for the joint assessment of 16 and 17 year olds (95%, down slightly from 97% last year). There is also evidence that the effectiveness of joint working between Children's Services and Housing is improving, with 64% reporting that joint working is 'very effective' or 'effective', compared to 58% last year (Graph 3).

Graph 3: How effective is joint working between Housing and Children's Services in meeting the requirements clarified by the G vs Southwark judgement in 2009?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=85
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: LAs: N=85

Overall, prevention services have remained steady, but local authorities still don't feel they have enough tools to tackle homelessness prevention among young people and there have been some decreases in the voluntary sector.

Case study 2: Preventing youth homelessness in rural areas

Ryedale District Council is a local authority based in North Yorkshire. As a predominantly rural authority, homelessness and youth services are spread out and access to public transport is limited and very costly. To address these issues the youth homelessness team conduct a lot of outreach work with schools who identify young people who are at risk of leaving home. This involves working directly with teachers who proactively contact the youth homelessness outreach team to visit the school. The outreach workers meet with the young person to talk through the realistic options they have if they leave home (unless there is any risk of harm to the young person by remaining at home). This includes understanding the cost associated with living independently, the local housing options that are available to young people and addressing the skills needed to sustain a tenancy. Home visits and family mediation services are also available and regularly take place with the young person and their family to try and resolve issues in the first instance.

Chapter 2: Becoming homeless

- There is a contrast between the scale of youth homelessness reported by homelessness providers and local authorities. Providers report seeing more young people who are homeless (68% reported an increase) whereas local authorities report seeing fewer young people (20% of people presenting as homeless were under-25, compared to 31% last year).
- These changes support evidence from elsewhere which suggests that declines in official statutory homelessness may have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness.²⁶ One explanation is that fewer young people are approaching their local authority for support and are approaching providers, or that young people are being signposted to providers as part of their local authority's advice or prevention.
- Parents or carers no longer willing to accommodate continues to be the leading cause of youth homelessness, a causal factor in nearly half of cases (47%) compared to 36% in 2014.
- A large proportion of young people in homelessness services are aged 18-21 (44%) and would be potentially affected by the proposed changes to end automatic entitlement for housing support for those aged 18-21.
- The proportion of young women in homelessness services was higher than previous years at 46%, compared to 40% in 2014.
- Despite being homeless, large proportions of young people (65%) are studying, employed or on a work/apprenticeship scheme, including 22% of young people in paid employment.
- The proportion of young people sleeping rough has decreased slightly – 17% had ever slept rough compared to 19% in 2014.

Despite increases in prevention work, youth homelessness remains a significant concern; half of people accessing homeless accommodation projects in England are under the age of 25.²⁷ Recent research into the scale of youth homelessness has shown that it has remained steady, or possibly increased in recent years, with concerning levels of rough sleeping and sofa surfing reported by young people.²⁸ These findings have emerged in contrast to trends in statutory youth homelessness, which has been declining over a number of years (Table 1).

Table 1: Statutory homelessness acceptances for young people, Q2 2011–15

	Total number of households accepted	<i>of which:</i> 16-24 year olds	<i>of which:</i> Household member vulnerable due to young person (16/17 year olds and 18-20 care leavers)
2011 Q2	11,820	4,240 (36%)	530 (4%)
2012 Q2	12,890	4,260 (33%)	440 (3%)
2013 Q2	13,470	3,840 (28%)	380 (3%)
2014 Q2	13,140	3,380 (26%)	320 (2%)
2015 Q2	13,850	3,370 (24%)	330 (2%)

Source: DCLG, Tables 773 and 781, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

²⁶ Watts, B., Johnsen, S. and Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Review for The OVO Foundation, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University <https://ihurerblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/youth-homelessness-in-the-uk.pdf>

²⁷ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

²⁸ Centrepont (2015) Youth Homelessness Databank: Beyond Statutory Homelessness: http://centrepont.org.uk/media/1690269/0054_yhd_report_full_v12.pdf

Although homelessness can happen to anyone at any time, certain groups of people are more at risk. For example, among those who use homelessness services, there tends to be a higher proportion of men, people who have been in care, and people with an offending history.²⁹ However, the socio-demographics of people under-25 can be slightly different to the overall adult homeless population, reflecting differences in the causes of homelessness and subsequent support needs.

There are a range of personal, interpersonal and structural factors that can lead to, or contribute towards, youth homelessness. It is often the interplay of factors rather than one or two triggers that can result in young people reaching crisis point. Research³⁰ has consistently shown that young people unable to remain living with parents/care-givers is the single biggest cause of youth homelessness. This contrasts with the main cause of statutory homelessness among the adult population, which is currently the end of an assured shorthold tenancy – the reason for loss of last settled home for 30% of households accepted as statutory homeless. This year's findings provide an update on the scale of youth homelessness and the causes.

Scale of youth homelessness

Consistent with findings from other research and national statistics, respondents to our local authority survey reported lower proportions of young people presenting as homeless, and being accepted as homeless. In August 2015, 20% of people who approached their local authority for support were under-25. This shows a considerable drop from the 31% reported in August 2014. Authorities were also asked if the number of young people re-presenting as homeless had increased, with the majority (77%) reporting that numbers had not increased.

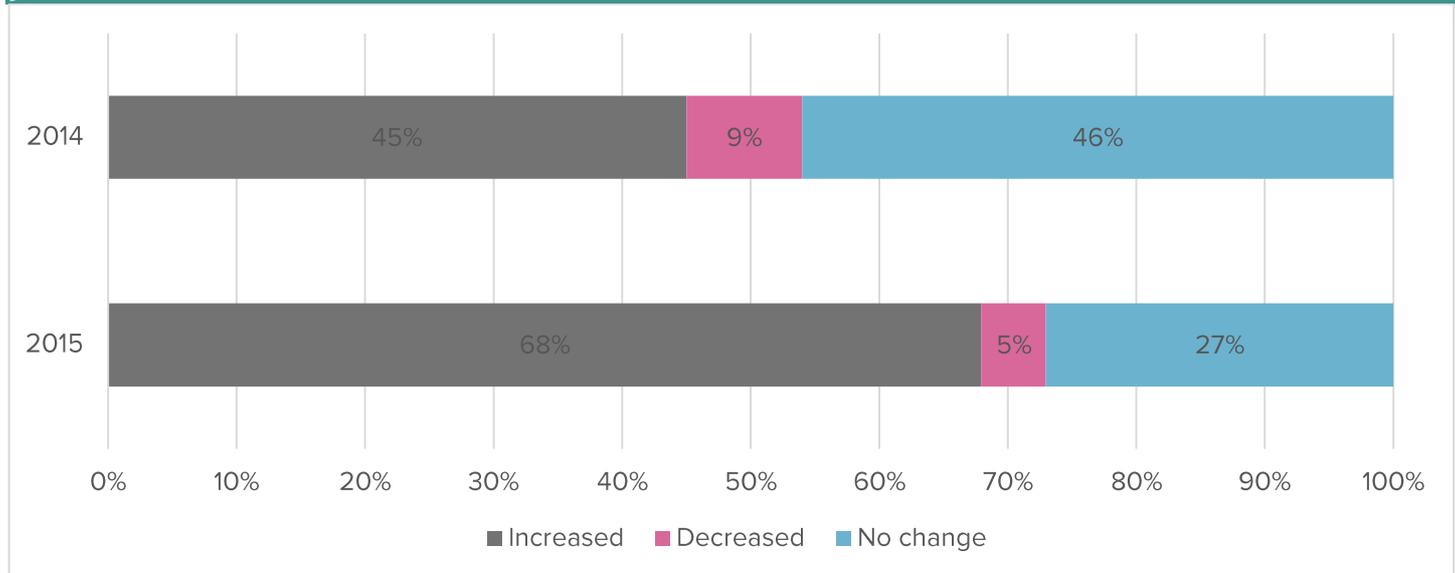
Of the 20% who presented as homeless, 18% had their application accepted and were offered support. Consequently, more than eight in ten were not owed a statutory duty and had to seek support elsewhere. This may include support from the voluntary sector.

A different picture emerges from the provider survey. More than two thirds of providers reported that the number of young clients they saw had increased since last year. Last year, less than half reported such an increase (Graph 4).

²⁹ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

³⁰ Homeless Link, Young and Homeless reports 2011-2014: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/our-research/young-and-homeless-research>

Graph 4: Has the overall number of young clients that you see changed since August 2014 last year?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=159
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: Providers: N=99

The findings from local authorities and providers reflect different trends; the local authority survey points to a reduction in the proportion of young people presenting as homeless, and an increase in the proportion of prevention cases. One interpretation therefore, is that fewer young people are becoming homeless, perhaps as a consequence of the prevention work being carried out by local authorities.

Providers however, report an increase in the number of young people they are seeing. This supports evidence from elsewhere which suggests that declines in official statutory homelessness may have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness.³¹ It is possible that fewer young people are approaching their local authority for support and are instead approaching providers, or that young people are being signposted to providers as part of their local authority’s advice or prevention work.

Who is becoming homeless?

In August 2015, 46% of young people using homelessness services were women (53% were men, 1% were ‘other’ or unknown). This was a 6% increase on the same month the previous year, and is higher than the 30% reported among the adult homeless population³².

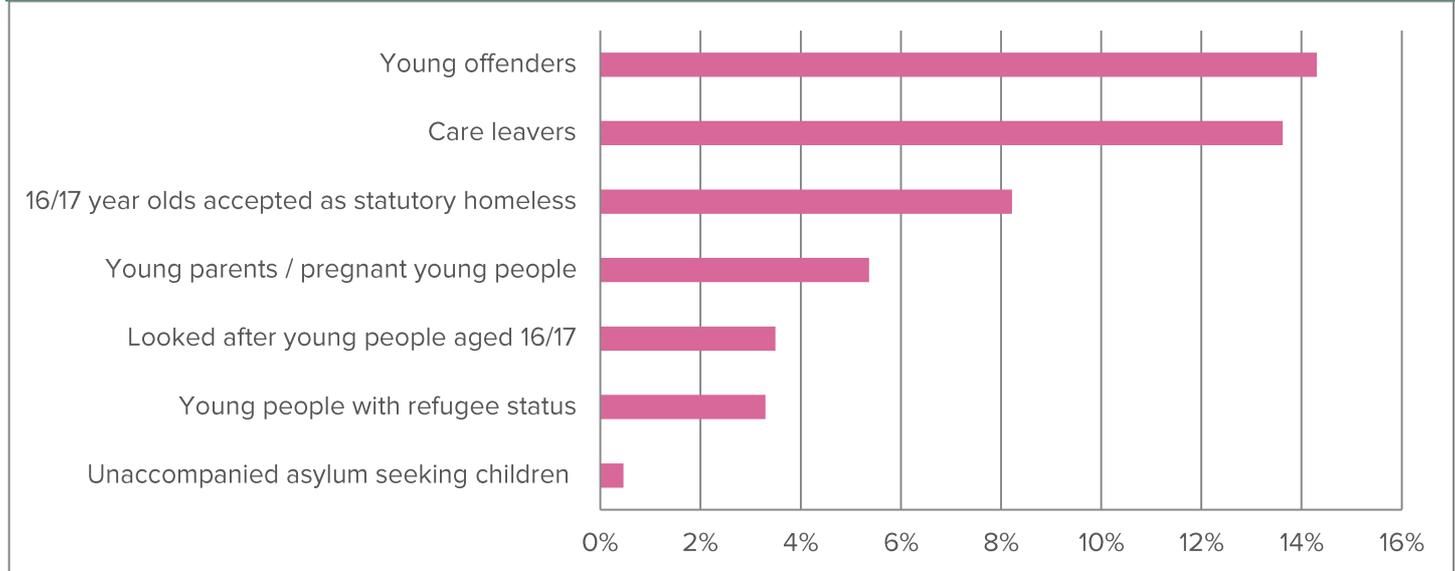
Looking at young people’s backgrounds, 14% had an offending history, and 14% were care leavers (Graph 5). These proportions are similar to the same month the previous year (15% and 12% respectively). The proportion of young people with an offending history is lower than the adult homeless population (22%)³³, highlighting that if support is given early on it may reduce the risk of later involvement with crime.

³¹ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

³² Ibid

³³ Ibid

Graph 5: How many of your young clients in August 2015 were in the following categories?

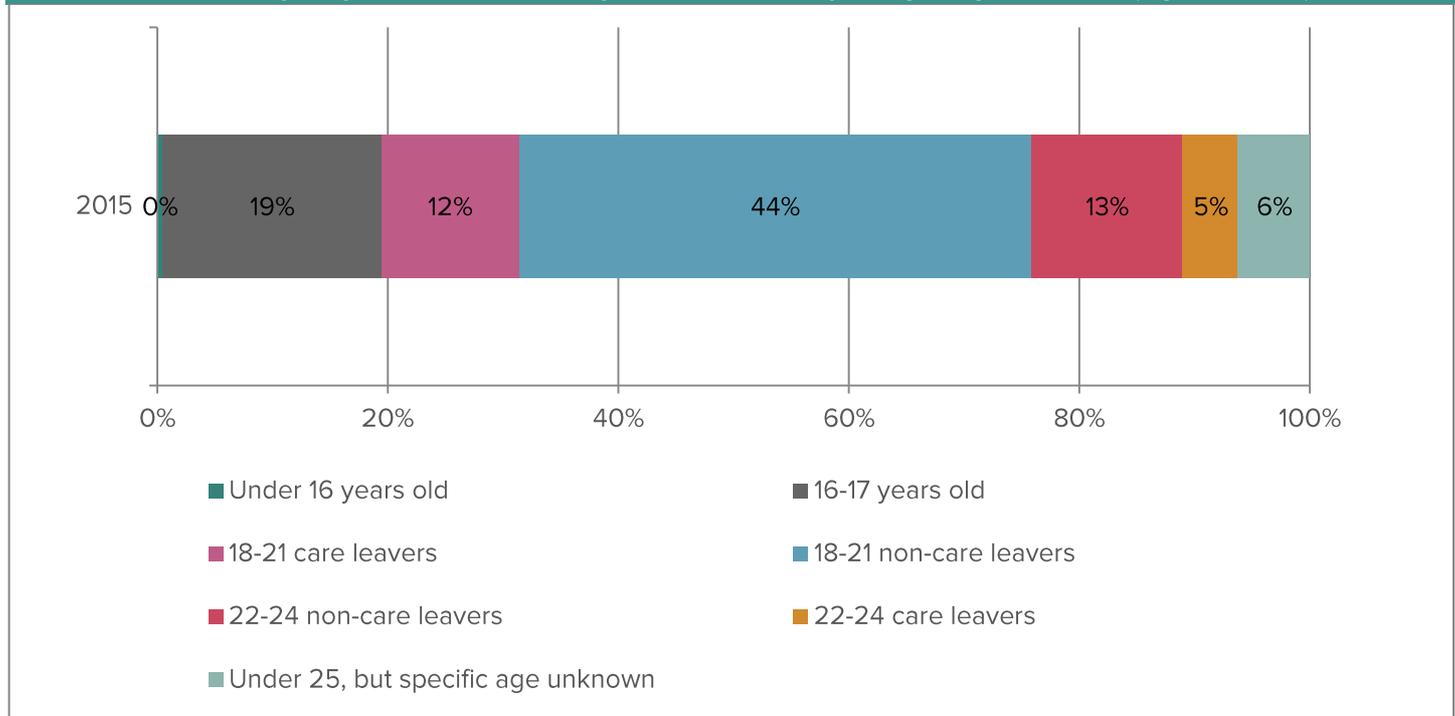


Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=165

The age breakdown of young people remains generally consistent with previous years. There continue to be very small numbers of under-16s, although one in five young people were 16-17 years-old (Graph 6). The most common age category comprised young people aged 18-24 who have not been in care.

44% of young people were non care leavers aged 18-21. This group of young people are most likely to be affected by the proposed changes to end automatic entitlement for housing support for those aged 18-21, limiting their ability to access crucial services, and affecting income for homelessness services.

Graph 6: How many of your clients in August 2015 were young single people (aged 16-24)?

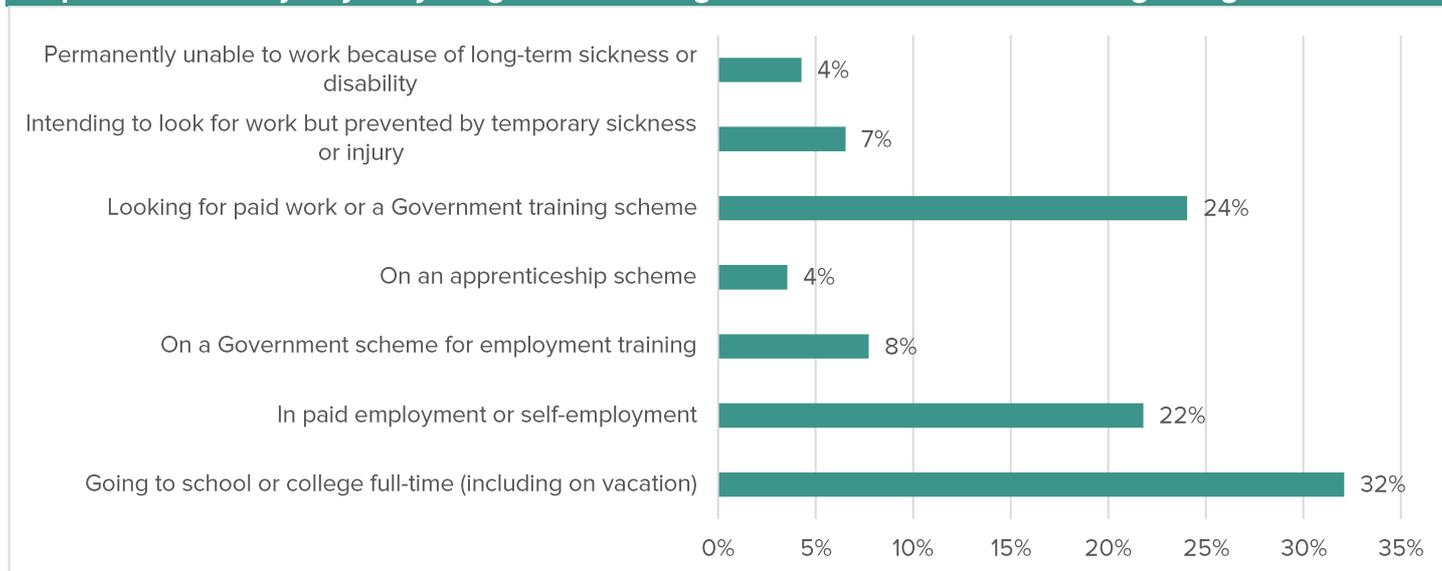


Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=158

Education, training and employment

Despite a lot of the challenges young people in homelessness services face, a large proportion (65%) are in some form of education, training or employment. Nearly a third (32%) are at school or college, and nearly a quarter (24%) are looking for paid work or on a government training scheme, however there are very few young people on apprenticeships (6%). The proportion of young homeless people in paid employment is higher than the adult homeless population (22% compared to 14%³⁴ respectively), (Graph 7). Only a small proportion (11%) of young people are temporarily or permanently unable to work because of sickness.

Graph 7: How many of your young clients in August 2015 were in the following categories?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=162

Why are young people becoming homeless?

Findings from this year show that parents/care-givers no longer able or willing to accommodate was a leading cause of homelessness. Nearly half of young people (47%) staying in homeless accommodation became homeless due to this reason, (Graph 8). This was an 11% increase on last year. A further 20% of young people were homeless due to other relatives or friends no longer able or willing to accommodate them. By contrast, only 28% of statutory homeless cases for all age groups are caused by relatives/friends unable or unwilling to accommodate³⁵. Abuse or domestic violence was also a contributing factor in 9% of cases, up from 4% last year.

A breakdown in family relations in the current socio-economic context can have a devastating impact on young people's opportunities and prospects. Young people in general are now more reliant than ever on family support as they transition towards independence. Trends in housing show that young people are staying in the parental home longer, and the increase in 'non-standard' less stable forms of

³⁴ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

³⁵ Department for Communities and Local Government, Statutory homelessness lives tables, April to June 2015: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-homelessness>

employment, such as zero hour contracts³⁶ which offer limited financial stability, make young people more reliant on family support for longer periods.

Rents are high and wages are low, our young people are finding it hard to get out of the parental home.

Respondent to local authority survey

Increasingly young people are having to remain at home as housing options in PRS decline.

Respondent to local authority survey

David's story

David is 20 and has been homeless for 6 months, during this time he has been sofa surfing and sleeping rough and is currently waiting to access accommodation. He became homeless after he was made redundant from his apprenticeship. He had some savings in the short term but this soon ran out and he could no longer afford his rent. Despite constantly applying for jobs since he was made redundant he has not been able to find work and the longer he has been out of a job the harder it is for him as employers look at the gap in his CV. He has found getting help looking for work and finding accommodation very difficult:

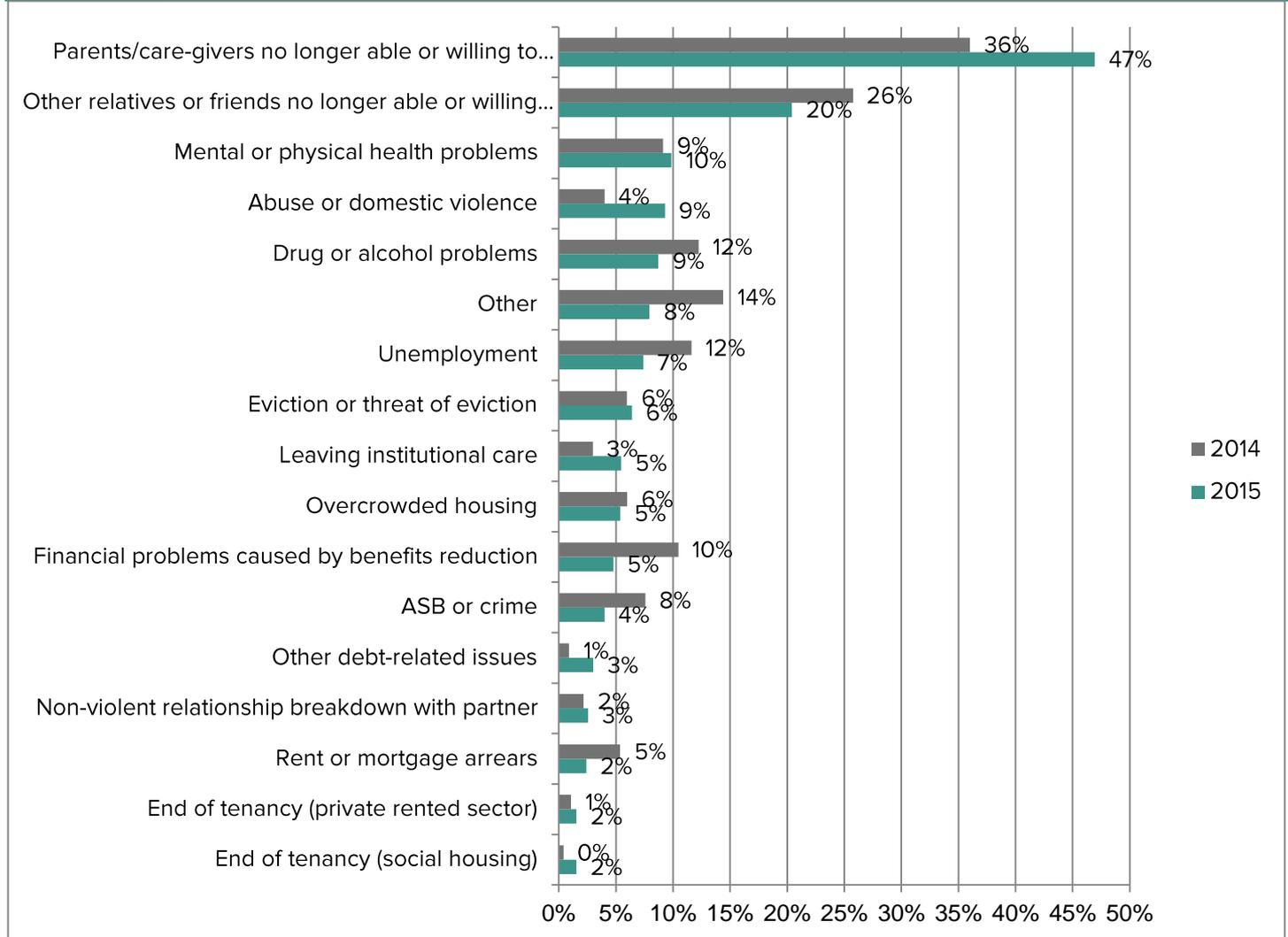
"It's not a nice place to be in to know you are capable of doing something but you are not receiving any kind of support because you are on your own in a way and you become part of the statistics. No-one wants to take you seriously even if you have qualifications and it's a really isolating time that you go through."

For the past ten years he has moved frequently as he, his mum and his sister were evicted from their home and have been living in temporary accommodation ever since. His mum is currently living in hostel accommodation on her own. Because of his mum's situation David is not able to move back in with her and he has no other support or options available to him due to his age and not being in priority need. He is struggling to find accommodation as he cannot afford a deposit to move into the private rented sector and his unstable income means he is worried about signing a contract again.

He has recently sought help from a youth homelessness service who are helping him to find and access suitable accommodation and employment and training opportunities.

³⁶ Tom MacInnes, Adam Tinson, Ceri Hughes, Theo Barry Born and Hannah Aldridge (2015) Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2015, Joseph Rowntree Foundation and New Policy Institute: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/mpse-2015>

Graph 8: How many of your young clients in August 2015 needed supported accommodation for the following reasons?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=149
 Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: Providers: N=92

Removing automatic entitlement to housing support for 18-21 year-olds (see introduction) therefore rests on the assumption that parental support will be available for young people to remain in the family home. For many young people who experience homelessness returning to the family home is not an option, David’s story on page 20 is an example of this. Indeed, some young people we spoke to were aware of some of the drivers behind the proposed policy, and felt that young people were being unfairly targeted.

I heard that they’re encouraging young people to stay at home until they’re 21, but sometimes, not all families can stay at home, sometimes there’s no choice, so I don’t think it’s an incentive really ... You do get a few that just choose to move out but most of them, the majority of them, have nowhere to go.
 Young person 1, service 1

I guess this is what you get for not voting. It makes sense they are catering to the supporters, the older, they need to make cuts somewhere is what they say, so they’ll cut the people that don’t exercise their voting will. So, it is not confusing why they are targeting young people, but we didn’t vote this time and we probably won’t vote next time. It makes things more difficult.
 Young person 1, service 2

Although some young people would be exempt from the changes, the full details are not known and there is concern over what would happen to young people who do not meet the exemption criteria³⁷ but nevertheless are not able to return to the family home. Parents/carers may be unable or unwilling to accommodate for a variety of reasons that cannot be resolved; one young person described leaving home as it was simply overcrowded and there was no room for him there. In other cases, young people left the home due to relationship breakdown and did not feel able to return.

There had been a level of aggression over the years, and obviously it got worse the bigger I got, so one day it was particularly bad – the thing is I was told to sleep outside, which happened often, and one day I didn't go back inside. I had to leave.

Young person 1, service 2

HB removed for under 21's will cause major problems as too many young people already left home and cannot go back.

Respondent to local authority survey

For many young homeless people, Housing Benefit therefore provides vital support, without which they would be unable to access accommodation, including supported accommodation such as hostels which is paid for using Housing Benefit. Removing automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit for 18-21 year-olds would impact up to 44% of the young people residing in projects that responded to our survey. A number of young people told us that without Housing Benefit they would have been unable to access and pay for any accommodation and still be street homeless or living in unsafe accommodation. This in turn would also make it harder for young people to remain in education, training or employment.

I'd be pretty stuck to be honest, I'm very grateful, I'm very grateful for it [Housing Benefit] because I wouldn't have any other way of paying for it ... if I didn't have it I think I would still be homeless.

Young person 1, service 4

There are a lot of people here between the ages of 18 and 21 and the only reasons they are in the position that they are working, studying is because they have a roof over their head and the support that Housing Benefit provides to pay for that. To take that away is going to cause a whole lot of chaos.

Young person 4, service 3

Young people with low incomes, little family support and low eligibility for social housing have been cited as the group facing the most difficulty in accessing appropriate accommodation.³⁸ Young homeless people, particularly those who have experienced family breakdown, are unemployed, or are on benefits, are arguably the most disadvantaged members of this group and with further cuts to their entitlements, may struggle to access any accommodation at all and they could ultimately be at risk of having no choice but to sleep rough.

³⁷ Exemption criteria is likely to include a history of care or known victims of domestic violence

³⁸ Rugg, J. and Quilgars, D. (2015) Young People and Housing: A Review of the Present Policy and Practice Landscape, Youth & Policy No. 114 <http://www.youthandpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/rugg-quilgars-young-people-and-housing1.pdf>

Sometimes we forget homeless can hit everybody, you know. People that travel and lost their job, or are just unlucky and end up on the street.

Young person 2, service 2

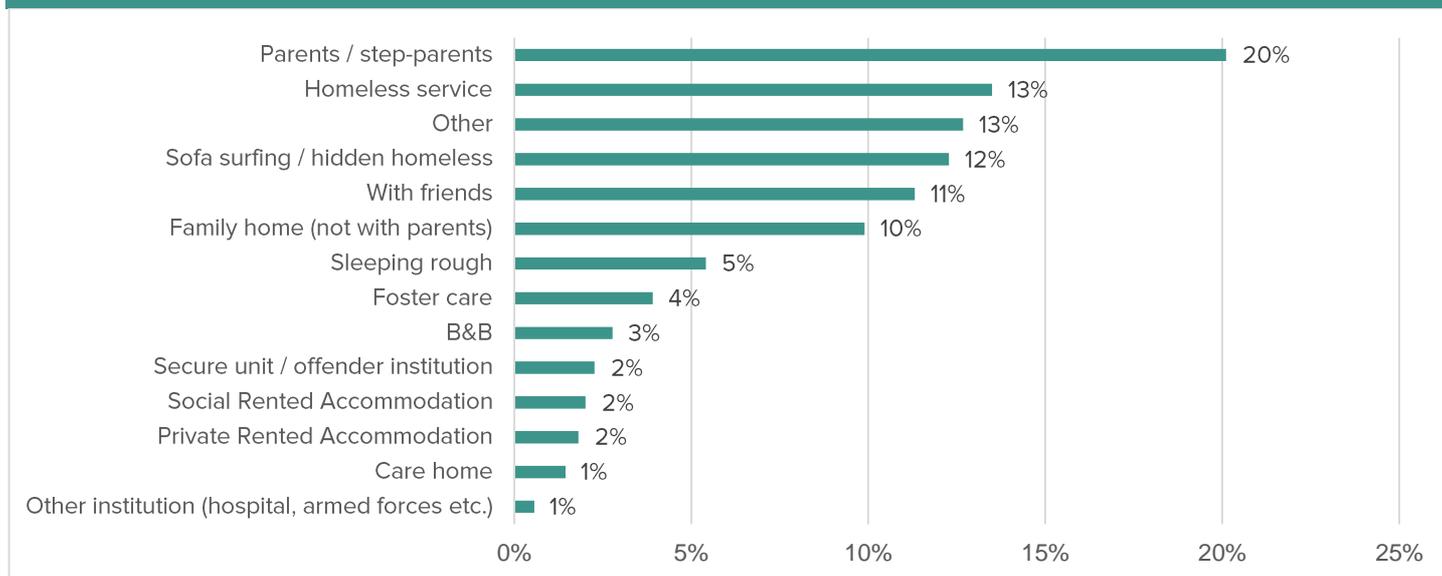
Where have young people come from?

A relatively small proportion of young people had spent time sleeping rough immediately before accessing support (5%, down from 8% last year). The proportion who had ever slept rough also decreased slightly to 17% (down from 19%). Those who had slept rough did so for a shorter timeframe during their last period of rough sleeping, with 44% spending only one or two nights rough sleeping, compared to 35% last year. However, it is still of great concern that more than a quarter of young people (27%) who slept rough did so for more than seven nights, the same figure as last year.

Sofa surfing (12%) and staying with friends (11%) were more common forms of previous accommodation than rough sleeping (Graph 9). Only 20% of young people in homeless accommodation came directly from living with their parents, despite inability to remain living with parents/care-givers being a cause of homelessness in 47% of cases. This demonstrates the tendency for young people to transition between different forms of accommodation as they seek solutions to their homelessness.

Other accommodation that young people were living in prior to being referred to homelessness providers included supported lodgings, Home Office Asylum Accommodation, squatting and housed with a trafficking service.

Graph 9: Where were your young people living immediately prior to using your service in August 2015?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=146

Chapter 3: Supporting homeless young people

- Young people without recourse to public funds or without a local connection are finding it increasingly difficult to access support as they are more likely to be turned away by services. This year 57% of services turned young people away because they had no recourse to public funds (compared to 24% last year) and young people with no local connection were turned away by 40% of services (compared to 25% last year).
- There is a lack of youth appropriate emergency accommodation in many areas – half of areas (49%) do not have Nightstop or a similar scheme, 43% do not have youth specific assessment centre or short stay supported accommodation.
- Local authorities are more likely to have provision of longer term supported housing options for young people compared to emergency accommodation. However, there have been some reductions, 29% of areas report that hostels and foyers are either not available or there is less availability and 34% of local authorities report the same for shared housing with floating support.
- Bed and Breakfast usage for 16 and 17 year olds does not occur in 41% of local authorities. However 59% of local authorities still report rarely or occasionally using B&Bs for this age group.
- Whilst slightly lower than last year, 55% of young people living in homelessness accommodation have complex needs and 34% have mental health issues (an increase from 23% in 2014).
- More young people in homelessness services are in employment, education and training, the proportions of NEET young people has dropped from 59% last year to 41% in 2015.
- Homelessness providers continue to provide a range of support services for young people. There has been an increase in the proportion of providers offering mediation services - 73% compared to 41% in 2014.
- More than three quarters (78%) of providers reported cuts to external youth support services that they refer young people to for wider needs such as mental health and wellbeing, education and careers advice and substance misuse.

Homelessness for young people rarely follows a linear path, but can involve transitioning in and out of homelessness, staying with friends, sofa surfing or sleeping rough before accessing appropriate support. Homeless young people may also be housed in unsuitable forms of accommodation, such as bed and breakfasts (B&Bs) during periods of homelessness. However, B&Bs are considered inappropriate for housing homeless people, particularly young people, as there is a lack of support, the quality varies, and there are major safeguarding concerns.

To reduce the risk of rough sleeping or time spent in inappropriate accommodation, young people need access to suitable forms of both emergency and longer stay accommodation. For emergencies, youth specific accommodation — such as Nightstop or emergency supported lodgings where young people can stay with a host family and receive short-term support and respite from a crisis situation — can offer age-appropriate support for homeless young people. For mid- and longer-term stays, there are a range of accommodation types for young people, with varying levels of support. These include supported accommodation and hostels or foyers, often a starting point for young people until they are ready to move on. ‘Floating’ support is a service to support those living in their own tenancies and there are also a range of shared housing models, similar to student accommodation, for those in education, training or employment, which offer ‘light touch’ support.

Help with accommodation is often only one of the areas a young person will need support with if they experience homelessness. Other needs may relate to the factors which contributed to their homelessness in the first place, such as relationship problems, disrupted education, substance misuse and mental health problems. Many of these issues can be exacerbated by the strain that

homelessness places on young people's lives. Other support needs are linked to homelessness, such as the need to manage benefits, find suitable accommodation, and develop the living skills required to live independently. Such a sudden transition into the demands of adult life for young people who may lack the emotional and mental skills to cope with these demands can be traumatic, so providing support for these needs is vital to reduce the risk of future homelessness.

This year's report provides an update on young people's support needs, and what services are doing to help them.

Access to homelessness services and support

In some cases, young people approaching accommodation providers for support may be turned away. Six out of ten services reported having to turn young people away because their needs were too high, making this the most cited reason by services, consistent with last year (Graph 10).

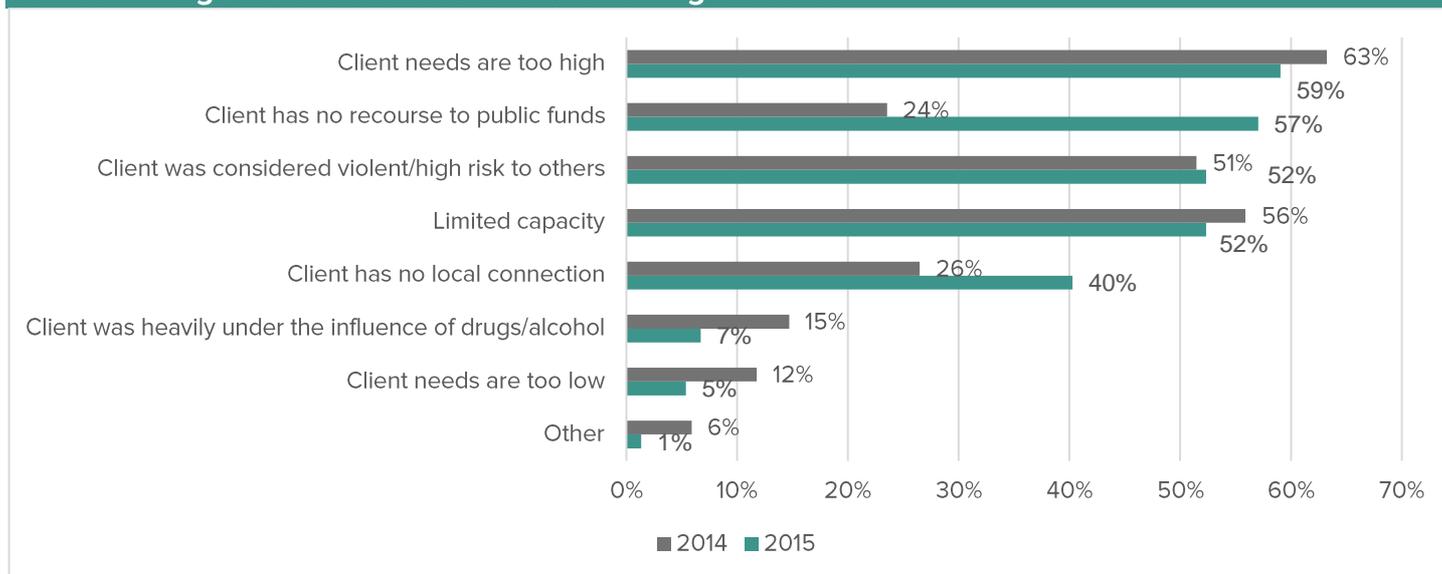
However, the proportion of services having to turn individuals away because they had no recourse to public funds doubled compared to last year, rising from 24% to 57%. Young people with no local connection were turned away by 40% of services, compared to 25% last year. This year providers were asked for the first time whether they have had to turn away young people because there was no statutory duty owed and therefore the young person does not meet the referral or funding criteria. For 7% of providers, young people were turned away for this reason.

These findings suggest that stricter eligibility criteria may be making it harder for some young people to access support. Cuts to services and reductions in funding have led to many services having to define stricter criteria for access. It can also impact young people whose needs are considered too high or too low. Of concern is what happens to young people whose needs cannot be met by statutory or voluntary providers, as they would have little choice but to sleep rough or become hidden homeless, when family support is not available.

Support is much more narrowly focused on those with borough connection; those without this have very limited support available. This includes EEA nationals, for example.

Respondent to provider survey

Graph 10: Have you been unable to assist any young homeless people who approached your service in August 2015 because of the following reasons?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=149
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: Providers: N=68

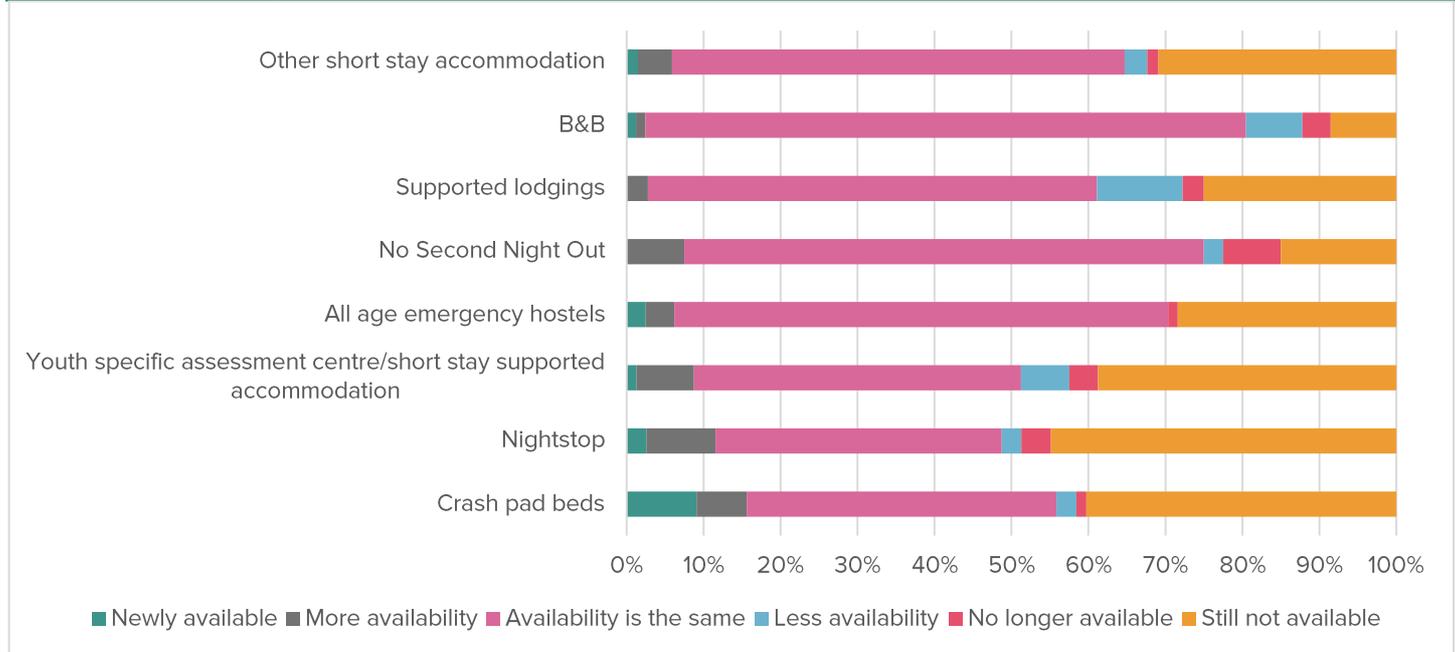
Emergency accommodation options

Overall, the provision of emergency accommodation appears to be remaining consistent, the majority of local authorities reported that provision has either stayed the same or was not available in the first place (Graph 11). However, there are still areas where youth specific emergency accommodation is not available. Half of local authorities (49%) reported that Nightstop is not available in their area, 43% do not have youth specific assessment centre or short stay supported accommodation and 41% of local authorities do not have crash pads in their area.

The largest increase in provision since 2014 was for crash pad beds; 15% of local authorities reported that this provision is newly available, or there is increased availability. The biggest decrease in provision since last year was for supported lodgings, where 14% of local authorities reported the service closing or being reduced. B&B accommodation remains the most available type of emergency accommodation, consistent with last year.

No local authorities reported using B&B accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds often and 44% do not use B&B accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds at all. However this still leaves 59% of local authorities rarely or occasionally using B&Bs for this age group which is concerning given it's inappropriateness for this group. We also asked if other services (i.e. not the homelessness department) used B&B accommodation for under 25s; whilst an improvement on last year 15% of local authorities reported that other services often used B&B and 39% said that other services occasionally use B&B accommodation.

Graph 11: Has the provision of the following types of emergency accommodation in your area changed since August 2014 last year?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=68-82

Stacey's story

Stacey is 18 and has mental health issues including depression and anxiety. She has suffered from this for six years and during this time has also self-harmed. While she was growing up she spent periods of time living in care as her parents struggled to cope with her illness as her mum has physical disabilities and health issues herself:

"They didn't really deal with it [depression and anxiety] because I wouldn't get up or start helping around the house. I would just get called lazy but it wasn't like that, I couldn't physically get myself out of bed and even leaving the house would set off an anxiety attack."

Due to living in care and her family moving around a lot she hasn't received the support she needed for her mental health. Stacey felt that the services she was referred to didn't take her anxiety and depression seriously:

"Clearly I needed help but nobody was listening, and it's like when will they help, when will they notice. They don't notice until somebody kills themselves, it shouldn't get to that point."

After returning home again Stacey started arguing with her parents and there was a lot of tension in the house and her parents eventually kicked her out. She sofa surfed with a friend for a few weeks but felt she couldn't impose on them any longer and became street homeless for a few months. Eventually a friend told her about the supported accommodation that was available with a local homelessness service and she was able to access a room with them.

The homelessness provider has helped Stacey to access a local mental health service and she is currently waiting to be referred to a therapist. Her supported accommodation runs a support group and she is receiving one to one support for her anxiety. They have also helped her apply for college after being out of education for two years.

Long term supported accommodation options

Local authorities reported greater provision of longer term supported housing options for young people compared to emergency youth provision. However, there have been some reductions in certain types, 29% of areas reported that hostels and foyers are either not available or there is less availability and 38% of local authorities reported that supported lodgings have either reduced or is not available (Graph 12). Shared housing with floating support showed the largest growth, 15% of areas said this has either increased or is newly available but 28% of local authorities reported this is still not available.

Graph 12: Has the availability of the following longer term supported housing options in your area changed since August 2014 last year?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=59-84

It is concerning that access to longer stay accommodation projects are showing signs of depletion. Respondents to the local authority survey cited access to supported housing as one of the key factors in their ability to prevent youth homelessness.

We are about to lose a young person specific housing support service in the City, which has been running for 20 years and has been a main referrer into our service, so we are concerned about the impact this will have on homeless young people. There will no longer be specific support for young people and they will have to access generic services which are unlikely to be able to cater for their needs.

Respondent to provider survey

Young people's support needs

Compared to last year, there was a slight reduction in the proportion of young people with support needs. Not being in education, training or employment remained the most common support need, but this has reduced from 59% of young people last year to 41% this year (Graph 13). There were also notable reductions in young people lacking independent living skills and relationship skills. Bucking the overall trend for a decrease in support needs, increases were seen in young people's health needs. The proportion of young people with a physical health problem increased from 8% to 12%, and more notably, mental health problems increased from 23% to 34%. Stacey's story on page 27 shows

how mental health issues can be a driver of homelessness and how important it is to provide the right support for young people at an early stage.

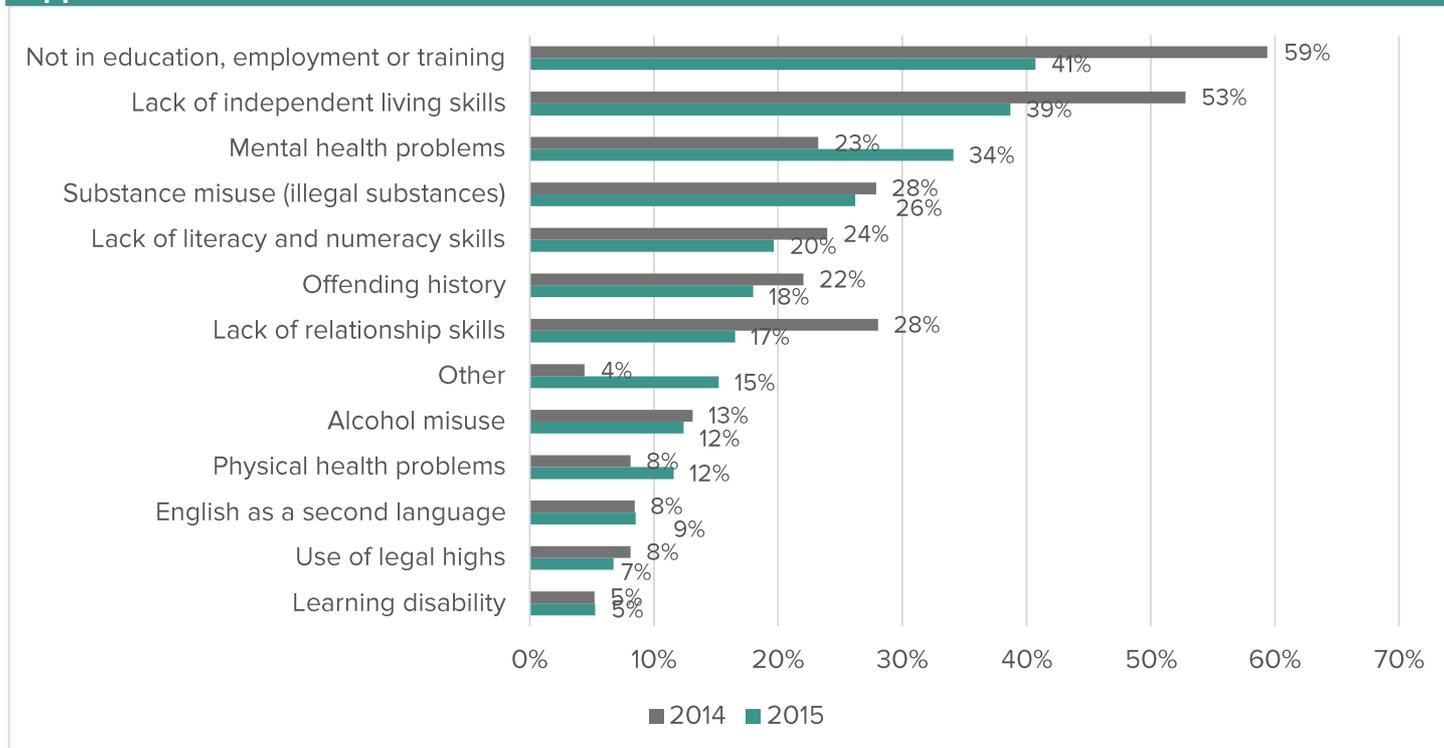
Over half (55%) of young people have complex needs which is defined as more than one of the following support needs: mental health, learning disability, substance misuse, offending behaviour, homelessness, family breakdown. This is slightly lower than 2014 where services reported that 60% of young people had complex needs but still accounts for a large proportion of young people being supported by homelessness services and can be quite challenging for providers to meet their needs:

The quality of our referrals has changed quite dramatically with the needs of the young person being far higher than we can support. Mental health/complex needs and offending behaviour being the prime needs. Whilst we want to offer support and accommodation to these young people we have to consider the impact it has on our other residents.

Respondent to provider survey

Other support needs related to fleeing violence and being at risk of abuse and sexual exploitation.

Graph 13: How many of your young clients that used your service in August 2015 had the following support needs?



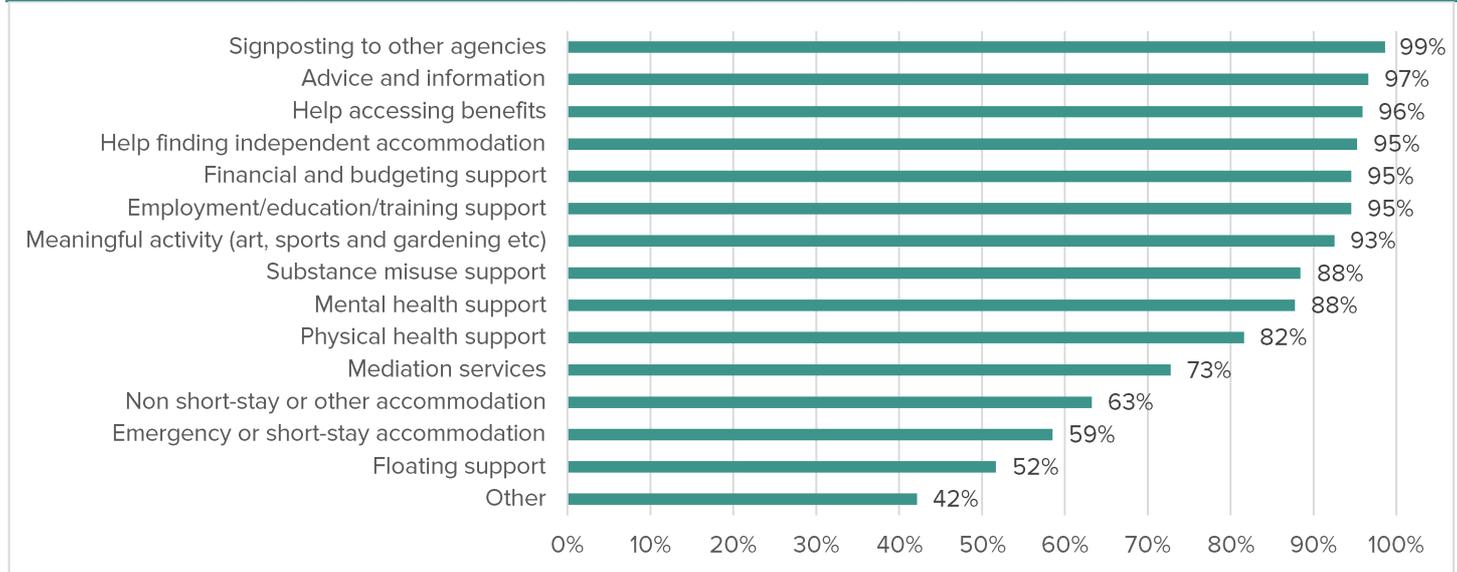
Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=147
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: Providers: N=91

Support available to young people

Services continue to provide a range of support to young people. The proportion of services able to offer the various forms of support generally remained similar to last year, or increased slightly. There was a notable increase however, in the proportion of services offering mediation (73%, up from 41% last year), (Graph 14). There was also an increase in providers offering non short stay accommodation (63%, up from 52%). In 'other' support category, services offered help with offending behaviour, emotional support, youth participation and engagement through a youth council and volunteering

work including links with local animal welfare charities. Case study 3 shows an example of an integrated pathway of services providing advice, support, prevention and housing services for young people across London.

Graph 14: What support services does your service provide to young people?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=147

The majority of providers reported increasing the availability of their support services, or maintaining them at existing levels (Graph 15). By contrast, they were very likely to report that there was decreased availability of external support services which they can refer young people to, along with reductions in general youth services. Extra support provided in-house may be partly a response to cuts elsewhere.

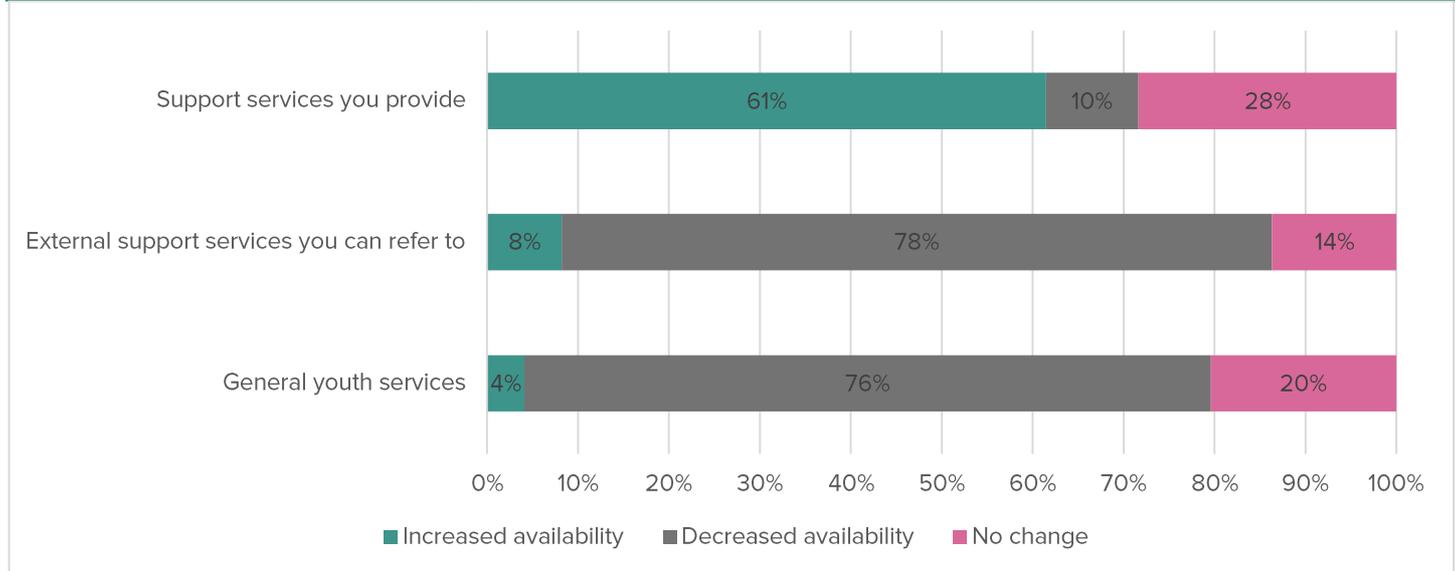
Many youth charities have been in difficulties recently and there has been a reduction of services in the area.

Respondent to provider survey

There is very little in the way of walk-in support services for young people since the loss of Connexions.

Respondent to local authority survey

Graph 15: How have the following support services and emergency accommodation options for young people in your area changed since August 2014 last year?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=98-148

Case study 3: Addressing youth homelessness through a holistic multi-agency approach

The London Youth Gateway is a single pathway approach funded by London Councils to address and prevent youth homelessness. The partnership between New Horizon Youth Centre, Alone in London, Depaul UK, and Stonewall Housing (and LGBT Jigsaw partners) provides specialist advice, prevention, accommodation and holistic services for 16 to 25 year olds in housing need across London. The London Youth Gateway engages at least 4,500 young people per year and in 2014/15 they helped 540 young people to access suitable accommodation.

Lead partner New Horizon Youth Centre is a day centre which provides services for young people, aged 16 to 21, seven days a week who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness. The day centre works on a self-referral basis so young people anywhere in London can readily access the services provided and do not need to approach their local authority first. New Horizon Youth Centre’s approach to working with young people is to design services that are as open as possible. The centre has an on-site nurse and counsellor who operate on a drop in basis as well as an appointment system to make the services approachable particularly for young people with self-esteem and confidence issues. In 2014/15 218 young people who were referred to one-to-one and/or group counselling. Other provision includes advice, resettlement, floating support and tenancy sustainment.

As well as offering services in relation to accommodation and health and wellbeing, New Horizon Youth Centre provides an education, employment and training (EET) service. This service is responsive to the increasing necessity to focus on helping young people into education, employment and training. However, there are a number of barriers which the service has identified:

- Finding good quality apprenticeships
- Sourcing employers who will take on young people and understand the needs of those experiencing homelessness

The EET provision takes a person centred approach which looks holistically at their needs in relation to housing, health and wellbeing, as well as employment, and also offers on-site essential skills training, accredited learning and employability coaching. In 2014/15 577 young people were supported into accessing employment, education, and training opportunities and 296 college, university or external training opportunities were accessed with their support. The centre values effective joint-working, and has developed positive working relationships with a local JobCentre Plus, local business partners and employers from the hospitality, service and travel industries to access jobs for young people and decrease the effect of benefit sanctions by those using the day centre.

Chapter 4: Moving on

- Homelessness providers report on average that young people spend 16 months in homelessness organisations before they move on, nearly double the length of time in 2014.
- The most common outcome for young people leaving homelessness providers is the private rented sector (28%). Returning home to family or friends is now the least common outcome for young people leaving homelessness organisations – one in twenty providers report this is the most common outcome compared to one in four last year.
- Schemes to assist accessing the private rented sector varied. Local authorities report that the availability of shared accommodation options developed with private landlords and relationships developed with private landlords to let to young people has decreased. The availability of rent deposit or cashless bond schemes has stayed fairly constant (87% of local authorities have one).
- Sanctions, changes to the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) and reductions in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) continue to have a negative impact on young people's ability to access accommodation. Providers were more likely than local authorities to report young people are impacted 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit'.

The amount of time young people need to spend in homeless accommodation will depend on a number of factors, including the organisational policy, the young person's needs, demands for the service, and the availability of suitable move-on accommodation in the local area. For some young people, mediation and conciliation with their families, or even simply some time out, mean that conflicts are able to be resolved sufficiently for them to return to live with family or friends. In other cases, young people need to be able to continue on the accommodation pathway towards independent living.

Concerns about 'silting' of homelessness projects has been flagged by homelessness charities as a concern for a number of years, and is often linked to a lack of suitable move-on options³⁹. This can prevent access to services for young people newly homeless, be demoralising for young people 'stuck' in the system, and risk young people having to move on to unsuitable accommodation.

In particular, it can be difficult for young people to access affordable and suitable accommodation. In recent years the private rented sector has been used as a means of resolving youth homelessness. This has been achieved through schemes that support young homeless people's access to privately rented properties, such as rent deposit schemes and the recruitment of private landlords willing to rent to young people. These schemes have been placed under pressure however, by changes to welfare benefits that have lowered the amount of Housing Benefit young people are entitled to, and increased competition by extending the shared accommodation rate to under-35s. Funding cuts to third sector agencies also place the extra support and mediation required to help young people maintain their tenancies under increasing strain. Furthermore, there are concerns about standards in the private rented sector due to the relative lack of regulation, and in some areas where the housing market is under pressure such as London and the South East, it can be difficult to access and afford a tenancy. There are also reports that private landlords are unwilling to rent to young people or to people on benefits, making securing a tenancy for homeless young people challenging.

³⁹ Homeless Link (2015) Support for Single Homeless People in England: Annual Review: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/Full%20report%20-%20Single%20homelessness%20support%20in%20England%202015.pdf>

This year's findings provide an update on what happens to young people when they move on and the schemes that are in place to help support them as they do so.

Length of stay in accommodation

The provider survey showed that young people spent time in homeless accommodation for periods ranging from one night to 29 months. The average length of stay this year was 16 months, almost double the figure from last year, when the average length of stay was 8.5 months. The maximum length of stay last year was 24 months. Although the increases may reflect a difference in the sample, for example if a larger number of longer stay organisations responded this year, the level of increase does suggest that young people are residing in homelessness projects for longer periods.

Move-on and accommodation options

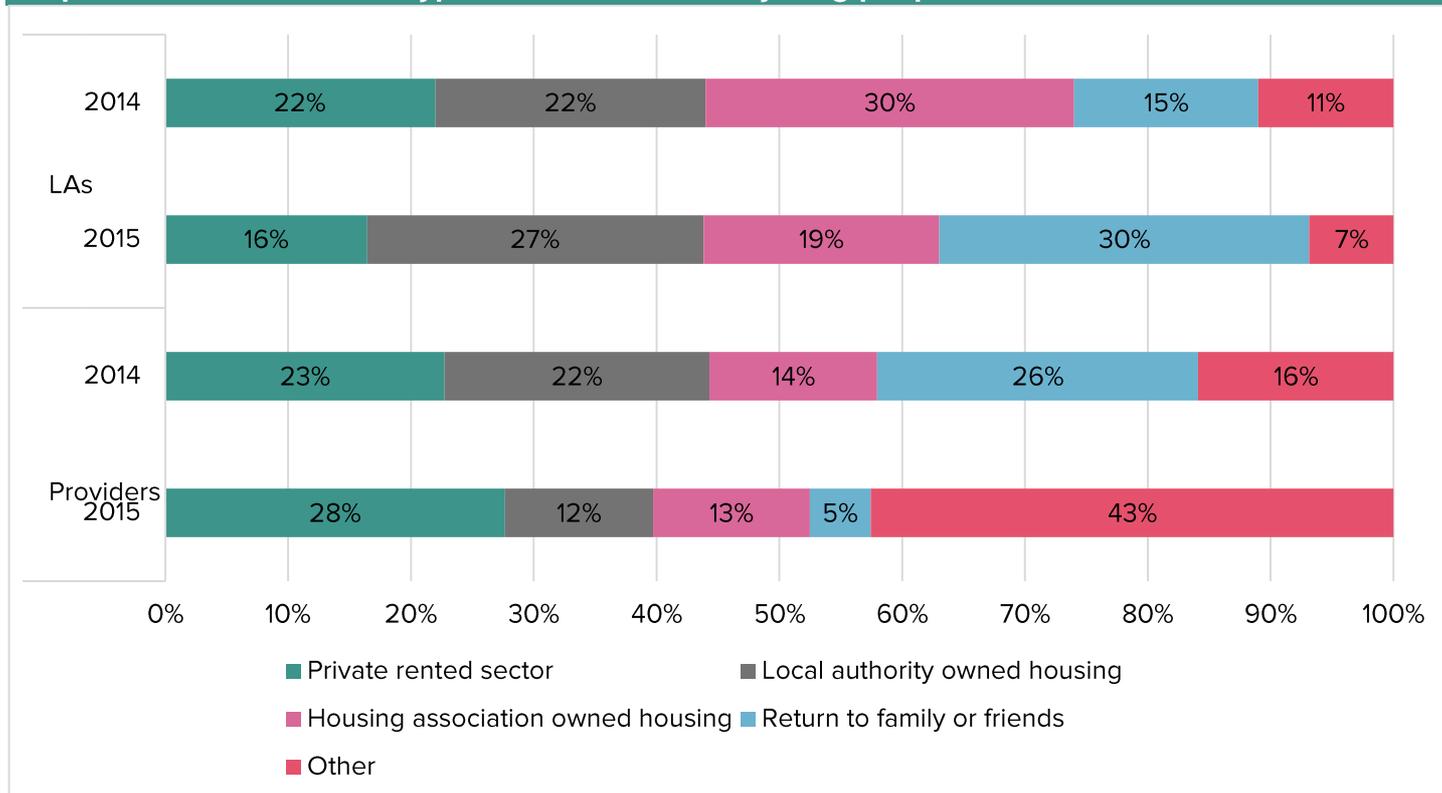
Both local authorities and providers reported different accommodation outcomes for young people compared to last year.

Local authorities were twice as likely to report that young people would return home to family or friends than last year (30% compared 15% in 2014), making it this year's most common type of move-on in the local authority survey (Graph 16). Moving into housing association owned housing was far less frequently cited as the most common form of move-on accommodation compared to last year (19% down from 30% in 2014).

In comparison, the most common accommodation outcome for young people leaving homelessness providers was the private rented sector (28%). Returning home to family or friends is now the least common outcome for young people leaving homelessness organisations. One in twenty (5%) providers reported this is the most common outcome compared to 26% last year. There was also a notable decrease in the proportions of young people who accessed social housing, 25% down from 36% in 2014. The research was unable to explore why there is a discrepancy between the accommodation outcomes of local authorities and providers but it would warrant further exploration.

More than four in ten providers this year reported that young people were most likely to move on to 'other' forms of accommodation. 'Other' included university accommodation and evictions with outcome unknown, but most commonly 'other' was reported to be another form of supported accommodation, often a step along the pathway for young people as they move towards independent living.

Graph 16: What is the main type of accommodation young people move on to?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=141; LAs: N=73
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: Providers: N=88; LAs: N=82

The fact that returning home to family or friends was this year the least common outcome for young people leaving homeless accommodation reiterates the fact that for many young people this is not an option. The availability of other forms of accommodation to help them transition towards independence is therefore essential. In many areas, particularly in London and the South East, there continues to be a lack of social housing, leaving young people who cannot stay at home with no viable option other than the private rented sector. However, the disparity between LHA and market rents continues to make the majority of properties unaffordable for young people.

There is a low social housing stock and few properties available so social housing is not an option for many/most young people. There gap between LHA and the market means the PRS can be unaffordable and there is limited supported housing supply.

Respondent to local authority survey

Accessibility is getting harder and competition is growing. Fewer properties and more requirements, e.g. to have a guarantor. Young people are restricted to the cheapest and poorest quality accommodation.

Respondent to local authority survey

The high demand for properties in the private rental market, and increased competition due to the extension of the SAR, means that young people are now having to do more to secure a tenancy. This includes having a 'guarantor', preferably in paid employment; for many young people a parent may be able to fulfil this role but for homeless young people without financial support from family this is not an option.

Most managing agents and landlords require a working guarantor. Often young people presenting as homeless or for housing assistance come from families who themselves are benefit dependent, so often young people cannot overcome this first hurdle.

Respondent to local authority survey

Landlord's reluctance to rent to young people stems in part from a concern that they will not look after a property correctly or manage to pay the rent on time. Landlords, therefore, often require 'proof' that young people will be able to sustain their tenancy. Young people may need to complete programmes such as tenancy training; this can encourage landlords to consider young people, as well as improving young people's confidence, but they can also become another hurdle that young people have to overcome before they will be considered by landlords.

With the tenancy training programme confidence has improved.

Respondent to local authority survey

Reluctance by both PRS and social landlords. Often required to spend longer periods of time in temporary accommodation to 'prove' themselves first.

Respondent to local authority survey

An increase in the amount of time spent in accommodation projects, therefore, may reflect not only a dearth of suitable move-on options for young people, but the added pressure of being able to demonstrate that they are tenancy ready. Some young people themselves also expressed a preference for feeling secure and able to live independently before they move on.

I'm going to stay here for as long as I can so I can make myself actually stable before I move out.

Young person 3, service 3

Due to the challenges in accessing properties in the private rental market, schemes that help young people secure accommodation, play an ever more crucial role, and the reduction in some of these schemes is concerning. Unfortunately, landlord's reluctance to rent to young people appears to be further compounded by the proposed changes to Housing Benefit entitlement for 18-21 year olds. Many respondents to both surveys reported that they are already starting to see the impact of this, in both the social and private rented sector.

It is usually virtually impossible for young people to access privately rented accommodation without significant support i.e. the arrangement being brokered with financial and professional assistance, which is not often a guarantee of a let being made. It seems very likely that the government's proposals for 16-21 year olds to have no 'automatic' entitlement to Housing Benefit will further encourage landlords and lettings agencies not to consider young people of this age.

Respondent to local authority survey

Confidence is starting to be affected by proposed changes to access to Housing Benefit for 18-21 year olds, especially for social landlords who are aware of proposed changes and are beginning to challenge allocations and ask questions about how allocations are framed.

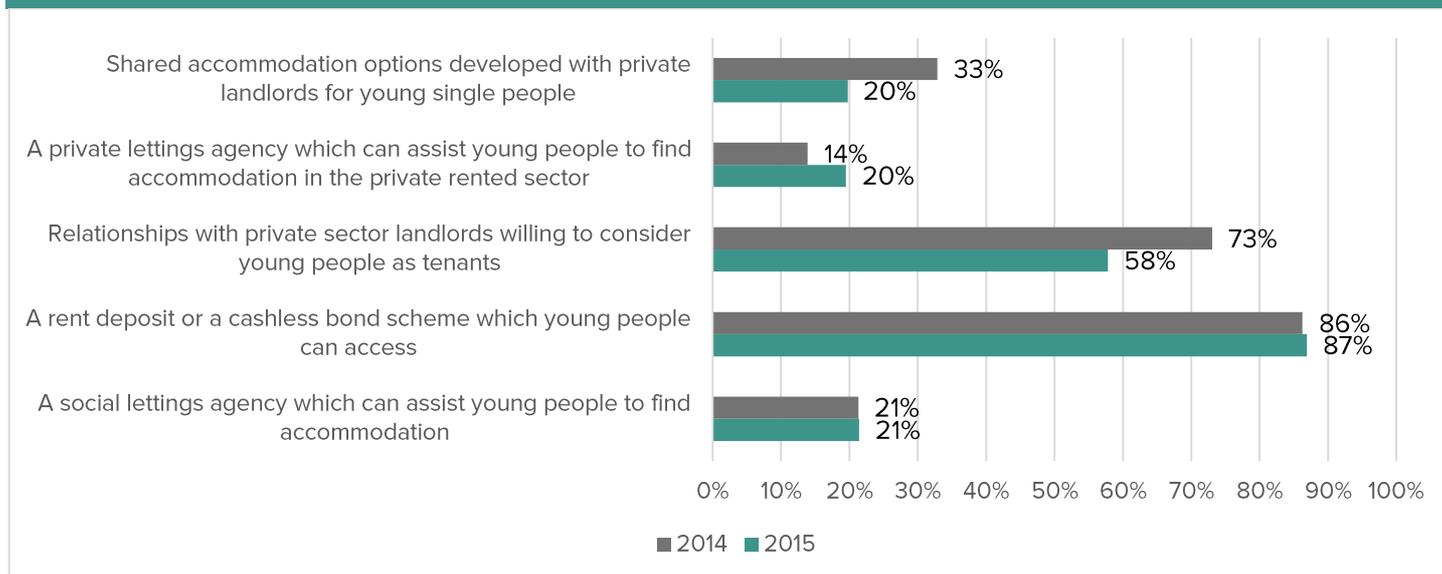
Respondent to local authority survey

Accommodation access and support schemes

In terms of support schemes that local authorities can access to help young people secure accommodation, respondents this year were less likely to report that they have access to shared accommodation options developed with private landlords for young people, or relationships with private sector landlords willing to consider young people as tenants (Graph 17).

However, there was an increase in the proportion of local authorities reporting that they have a private lettings agency which can assist young people to find accommodation in the private rented sector. Access to rent deposit or cashless bond schemes has stayed fairly constant since 2014 and were available in 87% of local authorities. Local authorities were also asked for the first time whether they have shared accommodation options delivered through a registered provider, and 31% reported that they do.

Graph 17: Do you have any of the following support schemes for move-on accommodation in your area?

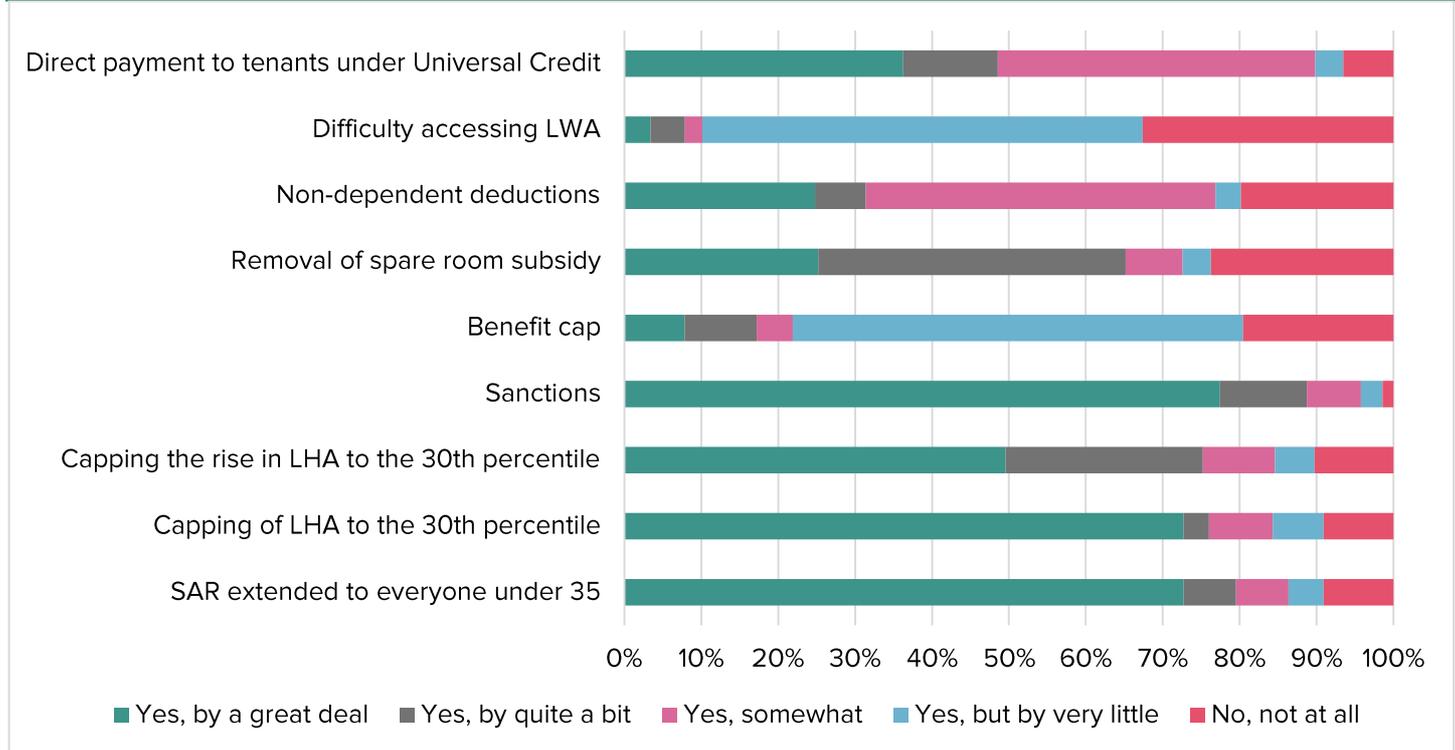


Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=84
Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2014: LAs: N=80

Welfare Reform and affordability

For young people in homeless accommodation projects, sanctions, the extension of the SAR and caps to LHA continue to have the greatest negative impact on their ability to access accommodation (Graph 18). This year, providers were even more likely to report that these reforms negatively impact young people 'a great deal' or 'quite a bit'. Providers reported that the benefit cap and accessing LWA cause the least amount of difficulty.

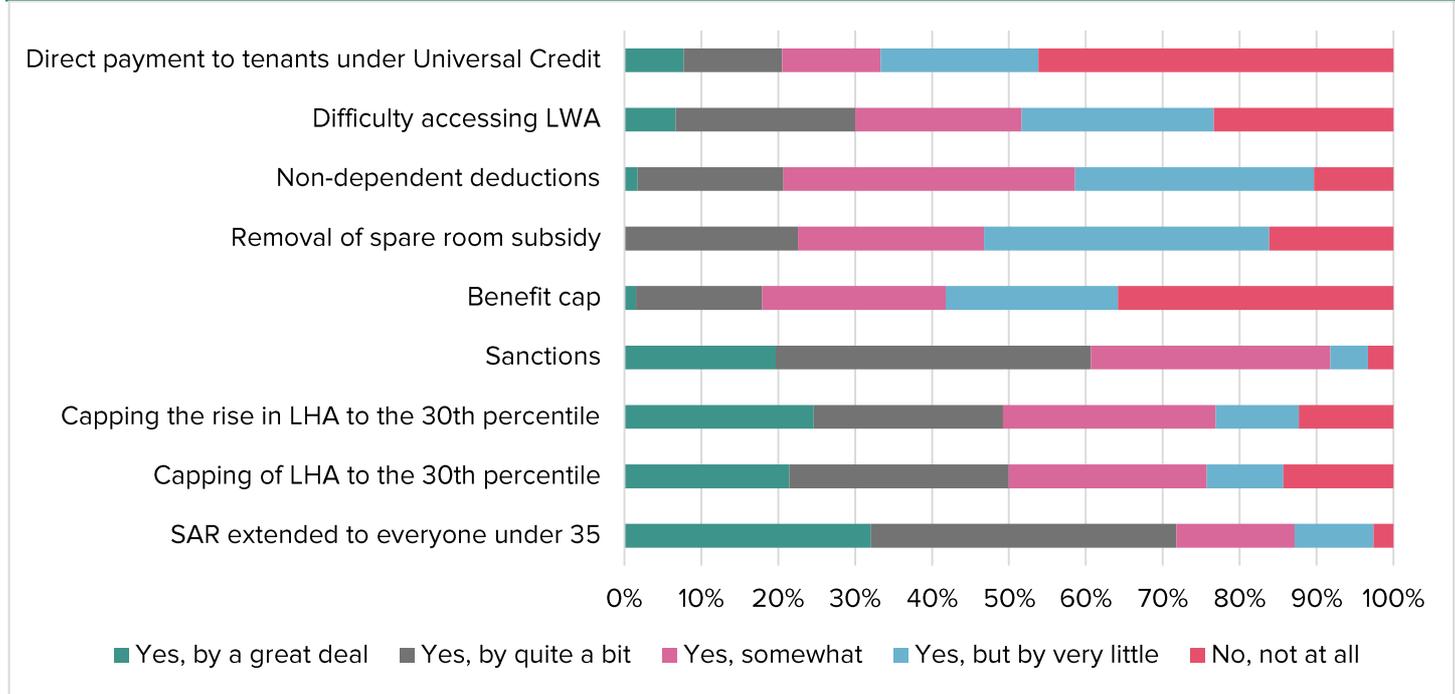
Graph 18: Have the following welfare changes affected young people's ability to access accommodation?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=89-142

Local authorities also reported that sanctions, the extension of the SAR and caps to LHA cause the most difficulties, but they were much less likely to report that young people are impacted ‘a great deal’ or ‘quite a bit’ (Graph 19). According to local authorities, the benefit cap and direct payment to tenants under Universal Credit cause the least amount of difficulty for young people’s ability to access accommodation.

Graph 19: Have the following welfare changes affected young people's ability to access accommodation?



Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: LAs: N=39-78

In addition to the already implemented welfare changes of reductions in LHA, local authorities and providers were already pre-empting the impact of the removal of automatic entitlement to housing support would have for 18 to 21 year olds.

We are really concerned about the effects if Housing Benefit is cut for 18-21 year olds. Young people having to live in shared private rented accommodation with strangers and no support is a constant concern and leaves them very vulnerable.

Respondent to provider survey

We are already noticing the impact of the pending removal of automatic Housing Benefit entitlement for 18 to 21 year olds as some accommodation providers will not accept referrals from us.

Respondent to provider survey

To remove HB for 18 to 21 years olds will prevent them from accessing any type of housing.

Respondent to local authority survey

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Our youth homelessness research this year shows a contrast in the scale of youth homelessness reported by homelessness providers and local authorities. Providers reported seeing more young people who are homeless (68% reported an increase) whereas local authorities reported seeing fewer young people (20% of people presenting as homeless were under-25, compared to 31% last year). These changes support evidence from elsewhere which suggests that declines in official statutory homelessness may have been offset by increases in other forms of homelessness.⁴⁰ One explanation is that fewer young people are approaching their local authority for support or are being refused access to homelessness assistance. Mystery shopping research with local authorities found evidence of young people being turned away by local authorities without being offered advice or assistance.⁴¹ Local authorities may also be signposting to providers as part of their advice or prevention.

There are encouraging signs of effective joint working between housing and children's services, with 64% of local authorities reporting that their joint protocol is working effectively. Combined with this, is the increase in the number of areas using and developing a Positive Pathway approach. The Positive Pathway sets out a clear framework for statutory and voluntary sector organisations to provide targeted support for young people to prevent homelessness and provide a range of suitable housing options and support. As part of this approach single homelessness services continue to provide a range of accommodation and support services to meet the needs of young people including increased provision of mediation services, which may be in response to cuts elsewhere.

There are however signs that services for young people are lacking in some areas. Over three quarters of homelessness providers reported cuts to general youth services and services they can refer young people into. Around a third of areas report reductions and a lack of supported accommodation for young people. More worryingly local authorities continue to report they do not have an adequate range of tools to address homelessness prevention. Education in schools, in particular, remains under-utilised and a decrease in the most effective forms of prevention – mediation and home visiting – is concerning and steps should be taken to ensure that this trend does not continue.

Despite the many challenges and barriers young people face when they experience homelessness, 65% are studying, employed or on a work/apprenticeship scheme including 22% of young people in paid employment. Having the means to pay for accommodation gives young people stability and the temporary help they need to remain in education and training. It also prevents them from becoming street homeless or living in unsafe accommodation. Parents or care givers no longer willing to accommodate remains the biggest cause of youth homelessness and for many young people returning to the family home is not an option. Our research has shown that a large proportion (44%) of young people in homelessness services are aged 18-21 and would potentially be affected by the removal of automatic entitlement to housing support. Policy changes that rest on assumptions of

⁴⁰ Watts, B., Johnsen, S. and Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Review for The OVO Foundation, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University <https://ihurerblog.files.wordpress.com/2015/11/youth-homelessness-in-the-uk.pdf>

⁴¹ Dobie, S., Sanders, B. and Teixeira, L. (2014) Turned away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England, Crisis. http://community.crisis.org.uk/file/policy---document-upload-or-download/MysteryShopping_Report_FINAL_web.pdf

familial and financial support will only be more damaging for young people already disadvantaged by a history of family breakdown or poverty.

Based on the findings from this year's report, the NYRG and Homeless Link suggest the following recommendations.

Recommendations developed with the National Youth Reference Group

The National Youth Reference Group (NYRG) is made up of young people aged 16-25 from across England who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. The group assists national and local government, and homelessness organisations, to develop and improve their involvement opportunities for young people. The NYRG was asked to provide practical recommendations based on the findings from this report. These recommendations have been supplemented by additional asks by Homeless Link.

A Strategic Response to young people at risk

In light of the policy changes affecting many areas of young people's lives - housing, education, employment and welfare - national and local government need to put strategies in place to assess and mitigate the risks for certain groups of young people:

- Homeless Link urges the government to prioritise a focus on young people at risk at a national level to respond to the cumulative impact of recent and proposed changes on young people. The Ministerial Working Group on Homelessness is well placed to initiate this cross governmental strategy.
- Every local authority should have a local strategy outlining how they will provide accommodation for young people at risk. This includes both adequate investment in housing related support, but also adequate provision for low cost move-on accommodation and schemes to assist this including rent deposit and bond schemes.

Access to affordable and sustainable housing

The NYRG recommends that:

- Letting agency fees charged to private rented tenants should be banned.
- Private rents and Local Housing Allowance rates should be more closely linked to local wages to help tackle affordability and help young people access accommodation in the private rented sector.

Improved advice and support for young people

The NYRG recommends that:

- Local authorities should increase the availability and access to floating support services for young people transitioning between homelessness accommodation and independent tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness. Support should not be time limited and allow young people to access help at any point in their tenancy.
- Homelessness providers and local authorities should ensure that move on options are talked about with young people when they first move into homelessness accommodation. This should include

information about how to access social and private rented housing and the length of time they are likely to be living in supported accommodation.

- Schools, colleges and homelessness services should increase the provision of life skills training for young people. This should include budgeting, cooking, and tenancy training to improve skills required for independent living.
- The government and local authorities should improve young people's access to education and advice on welfare benefits. This will be increasingly important in light of the transition to Universal Credit and understanding their personal contribution required to subsidise rent.
- Homelessness services and local authorities should increase the consistency of support work delivered to young people through their journey at all stages of the homelessness pathway. Specialist youth support training should be given to all staff working with young people in homelessness services.

Greater focus on prevention services

The NYRG recommends that:

- Schools and colleges should play a more active role in homelessness prevention in their area. There should be increased education on homelessness and greater access to mediation services to better integrate these into youth homelessness services to tackle the problem at an early stage rather than at the point of crisis management.

In addition Homeless Link recommends that:

- National government strengthens its commitment to act early to prevent homelessness. This should include continued investment in the national homelessness prevention grant, ensuring this remains an identifiable funding stream to support prevention activity in every local area.
- Local authorities, the NHS, and homelessness services to utilise joint health and homelessness commissioning plans to ensure they adequately identify and address the specific health and social care needs of young people experiencing homelessness.
- Every local authority to implement a Positive Pathway model to ensure appropriate accommodation options for young people are in place depending on their personal needs.

Training, education, employment and welfare

The NYRG recommends that:

- The government should increase access to financial support to assist young people to travel to destinations for work, education and training purposes as part of government training and work schemes especially in rural areas.

In addition Homeless Link recommends that:

- The change in housing cost entitlement for 18 to 21 year olds should not lead to homelessness. While we oppose the removal of the automatic right to housing costs, if current plans are implemented there need to be exemptions for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness alongside the vulnerable groups already identified. The government should continue to work with the homelessness sector in developing these.

- Proposals to lower the rate of social rent levels to LHA should be reconsidered in light of the disproportionate impact this will have on young people affected by the Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR). The provision of Discretionary Housing Payments is inadequate to make up the significant shortfall of the costs needed to access accommodation in many areas. We urge the government to carry out a full impact assessment which specifically considers any impacts on homelessness.
- Future employment support programmes and the Youth Obligation should take account of the additional pressures on young homeless people caused by their insecure housing situation. Tailored programmes with expert advisors are needed to ensure the right support is there to help young people manage these pressures, and participate fully in a way which matches their own goals and aspirations.
- Steps should be taken to ensure the design of Youth Obligation does not lead to unnecessary and disproportionate sanctions for young people, once implemented a co-ordinated approach needs to be adopted between Job Centre Plus and welfare benefit departments.

Monitoring of youth homelessness levels and trends

Homeless Link recommends:

- The government and local authorities improve data recording in order to help ascertain the scale of youth homelessness, identify trends and observe the impact of prevention work. This should include better recoding of the ages of every young person who approaches their local authority for homelessness assistance, the reason for their approach and the final outcome of this approach. This should be incorporated into the current P1E statutory homelessness and prevention and relief statistics.
- Children's Services should be required to record and monitor the number of under-25s placed in B&B to improve recording of B&B use.

Appendix One – Methodology

The findings in *Young and Homeless 2015* are based on two surveys with local authority housing departments and voluntary sector homelessness providers. Interviews with fourteen young people who have experienced homelessness were also undertaken. This is the fifth consecutive year the research has been carried out using the same survey methodology. Comparisons to previous year's results have been made throughout the report.

Surveys

In September 2015, Homeless Link sent a web-based provider survey to 742 members that included accommodation providers, advice services, day centres and housing providers throughout England. A similar local authority survey was concurrently sent to contacts in Housing departments of 326 local authorities in England. This year the surveys underwent a few revisions to improve the clarity and quality of the questions but still asked many of the same questions that were asked in youth homelessness surveys conducted in previous years.

Many of the questions were similar in both surveys, covering the number of young people that approached services in August 2015, the causes of homelessness, housing outcomes for young people, and related services in the area. The provider survey also asked providers about the support that they offer, and the local authority survey asked local authorities about the prevention work that they undertake. All survey respondents were asked to provide detailed comments in open text questions to help add context and explain the findings.

In total, we received 257 usable responses from both surveys; this consisted of 170 usable responses from providers of homelessness services and 87 usable responses from local authorities. This represents response rates of 23% and 27% respectively.

Interviews

During September and October 2014 we conducted semi-structured interviews with fourteen young people from four homelessness services in England. We chose a purposive sample based on our existing contacts and membership.

A panel discussion was also undertaken with fourteen members of the National Youth Reference Group⁴² to discuss preliminary findings and gain their feedback on recommendations. The contributions of all these young people are used throughout the report to reflect their experiences and views on how interested parties can work together to help end youth homelessness.

⁴² The National Youth Reference Group is made up of young people aged 16 to 25 from across England who are homeless or have experienced homelessness. The group exists to assist national and local government, and homeless organisations, to develop and improve their involvement opportunities for young people.

Appendix Two – Limitations of the data

The annual youth homelessness survey is a valuable source of information on the challenges and pressures faced by the services that work with this group, and on the work that is being undertaken to help reduce and ultimately prevent young people becoming homeless. Local authorities and homelessness organisations provide the data which enables this research to take place. As useful as this data is, it should be interpreted with caution based on the caveats outlined below.

Available data

Local authorities only record a small amount of data on young people who present as homeless. They are not required to record the exact age of young people other than their inclusion in certain categories⁴³. This makes it difficult to gather data on the exact age of young people approaching their local authority, their support needs and their outcomes. Beyond the data they are statutorily obliged to collect, local authorities vary in terms of how much data they record; for example, more than a quarter do not collect data on rough sleeping. This means that the survey results will inevitably represent a partial or incomplete picture.

Although data is available on the number of homeless applications made to local authorities and the number of acceptances for young people, there is no information on the numbers and demographics of people who are not permitted to make a homeless application. Consequently, it is not possible to discern whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing, and what proportion of this group are young people.

Likewise, there is no demographic data on people who make an application but are declined help as they are not in priority need, or are considered to be intentionally homeless. The number and proportion of young people who are homeless but declined assistance is therefore unknown. Consequently, although the number and proportion of homeless acceptances for young people can be tracked, it is not possible to know whether this coincides with an increase or decrease of young people in the other categories.

Accuracy of responses

We asked respondents to disclose if the figures they had provided for the whole survey were exact figures, best estimates or a mixture of both. A breakdown can be found below for both surveys:

	Local authorities	Providers
All exact figures	37%	27%
Mainly exact figures but some best estimates	38%	18%
A mix of exact figures and best estimates	12%	10%
Mainly best estimates, but some exact figures	5%	38%
All best estimates	8%	7%

Source: Homeless Link youth homelessness survey 2015: Providers: N=147; LAs: N=78

⁴³ 16-24 year olds, 16/17 year olds, 18-21 year old care leavers and 22-24 year old care leavers

Levels of disclosure

Providers of homelessness organisations and local authorities also vary in terms of how they obtain data on young people, and how they record it. A particular caveat pertains to the level of disclosure from young people. Discussions with the NYRG revealed that young people often do not reveal issues and problems readily, particularly if they have trouble trusting adults. In particular, professionals can be intimidating and young people say that they will not talk to professionals if they feel judged or ignored. Young people reportedly find it particularly difficult to discuss their needs in the local authority setting. Consequently, during initial interviews about homelessness young people may not disclose all their issues.

Data on young people may therefore be underestimated or underreported. Furthermore, observable differences between providers and local authorities may reflect differences in recording processes and levels of disclosure among young people in these settings, as well as possible variance in the profile of young people accessing these two services.



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

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