

Depaul UK Party Conference 2018 Briefing



“I was sleeping rough for about seven or eight months. It was me, my partner and my little brother homeless, all together. My missus had a miscarriage.”

- John, 22

Each year more than 80,000 young people experience homelessness. Homelessness puts young people in dangerous situations and leaves them unable to fulfil their potential. Government statistics show that the number of young people sleeping rough in England increased by 28 per cent between 2016 and 2017. The number of people aged 16 to 25 sleeping rough in London has doubled since 2010.

Depaul UK welcomes the Government’s commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022, and end it by 2027. **The Government’s recent Rough Sleeping Strategy could help young people sleeping rough to move off the streets, but much more needs to be done to prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place.**

Last year Depaul UK worked with more than 3,700 young people across the country who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The below recommendations are based on our experience of delivering services to these young people.

1. Invest in services that prevent young people from becoming homeless.
2. Bring housing benefit for young people back in line with the real cost of renting.
3. Further modify Universal Credit to reduce the length of time it takes for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to receive their first payment.

1. Invest in services that prevent young people from becoming homeless.

Short-term, preventative services can help young people to remain in their family home or find alternative accommodation before they reach crisis point. The Government should provide seed funding for councils to set up these services. Avoiding the human and financial costs of homelessness benefits young people, their families and the public finances.

“I lived with my Nan from the age of three up until I was 16 because my Mum went to prison. After my Nan died, it all just started from there really, like sleeping in sheds and tents. Then, because I walked past Depaul on a regular basis, I just came in. I stayed at Nightstop for a while, until they found my accommodation.”

In emergency hosting schemes, volunteer hosts give up their spare rooms and provide young people who need a safe place to sleep a bed and a warm meal for a few nights. While the young person is staying with a host, issues that put them at risk of homelessness can be addressed and long term accommodation found. Depaul’s Nightstop Network accredits emergency hosting schemes in the UK. Accredited schemes have rigorous vetting and risk assessment procedures. In 2017, Nightstop provided 11,070 bed-nights to 1,403 young people.



“I grew up in in care from the age of 12 ’til the age of 16. I didn’t have any family. I didn’t really have any friends. I ended up sleeping rough ” for a couple of months. It was horrible, freezing, you hardly got a wash.”

- Becky, 23

Currently less than half of the local authority areas in the UK are covered by a Nightstop service. Depaul UK is calling on Government to invest £2.2 million over three years in five new sub-regional Nightstop services. These services would then become financially self-sufficient, providing up to 7,500 nights of emergency accommodation a year.

Homelessness family mediation services help young people and their families to resolve issues that can lead to a young person leaving the family home. In one area a Depaul family mediation service prevented 62 young people becoming homeless over the course of a year, leading to an independently estimated average saving of over half a million pounds.ⁱ Despite these benefits, few areas are covered by a family mediation service.

2. Bring housing benefit for young people back in line with the real cost of renting.

“They sorted out a viewing for me to go and view a flat. The flat was alright, it’s just the price, my benefits don’t cover the rent.”

Young people are becoming homeless and sleeping rough because in many areas there is no accommodation available that they can afford, even with housing benefit. Most single young people without children are entitled to housing benefit that is intended to be enough to rent a shared room in a private flat. This is the shared accommodation rate (SAR). Like other types of housing benefit, the SAR has been frozen since 2016. The National Audit Office has found that this freeze is likely to have contributed to increases in the number of people made homeless.ⁱⁱ

Depaul UK looked at how much accommodation is available to young homeless people within SAR rates in the 40 local authority areas with the highest number of 18-to-25-years-olds sleeping rough. Official statistics show that across these areas 225 young people were sleeping rough on a single night. We could find only 57 rooms that would be available to them at rents within the SAR.ⁱⁱⁱ Depaul UK is calling on the Government to return the SAR to the 30th percentile of local rents, which is the level it was set at until 2013.

3. Further modify Universal Credit to reduce the length of time it takes for people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to receive their first payment.

Changes made by the Government to Universal Credit are a step in the right direction, but do not go far enough. Young homeless people who Depaul works with still have to wait over a month for their first payment.

The current policy of encouraging people to borrow money, in the form of official budgeting advances, to cover the gap before they receive their first payment is problematic. Automatic deductions to repay these loans are made from future Universal Credit payments of just £58 a week, leaving young people without enough money to cover their living costs for months. Young people use foodbanks or borrowed money from elsewhere to survive.

The Government should further reduce the time it takes for the first payment to be made. If this cannot be done Government should provide short-term grants, rather than loans, to cover the gap between people’s claim and their first payment.

If you have any question or would like to know more about the information in this briefing then please contact Dan Dumoulin, Depaul’s Policy and Public Affairs Manager. daniel.dumoulin@depaulcharity.org.uk; 07989 404363.

ⁱ Insley, E., Insley Consulting and Depaul (2011) Homelessness prevention: Can we afford not to?

ⁱⁱ National Audit Office (2017) Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General: Homelessness

ⁱⁱⁱ Depaul UK (2018) Life on the Streets: Young people’s experiences of sleeping rough