



DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

Life on the Streets: **Young People's Experiences** **of Sleeping Rough**

Graeme McGregor and Daniel Dumoulin, Depaul UK

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INTRODUCTION

According to Government figures, the number of young people sleeping rough in England increased by 28 per cent between 2016 and 2017. This is unacceptable. No young person should find themselves sleeping on the streets. Every young person should have a stable home where they can build a happy, healthy life.

Depaul UK works with more than 3,700 young people a year. We provide services including emergency accommodation, longer-term, supported housing and community outreach. Our Nightstop network operates from 30 services across the UK, providing more than 11,000 nights of accommodation a year. We deliver many other homelessness support services across London and the South East, the North East, Greater Manchester and South Yorkshire. Every day we see the enduring damage that rough sleeping does to young people's lives.

We have published this report as a call to action – charities like Depaul UK cannot tackle youth rough sleeping alone. We need support from the public and all levels of government.

The extraordinary and moving first-hand stories in this report provide a fresh insight into the complex and tragic circumstances that lead to young people living on the streets – and the resultant harm to their health and wellbeing.

The report's analysis of accommodation and housing benefit shows that young people are sleeping rough because there simply is not enough affordable accommodation available to them.

Many of our most vulnerable young people are being left to fend for themselves on the streets. Previous research conducted by

Depaul UK surveyed more than 700 young people who have experienced homelessness and found that one quarter had slept rough.¹ Shockingly, those with disabilities or long-term mental health conditions were more than twice as likely to have slept on the streets as those without these disabilities or conditions.

Existing research also shows that rough sleeping takes a heavy toll on the physical and mental health of people of all ages.² People sleeping rough are over nine times more likely to commit suicide than the general population.³ We also know that the number of people recorded as dying while sleeping rough is rising and that their deaths are often violent.⁴

These alarming statistics highlight not only the dangers of rough sleeping for young people, but also the urgency with which this growing problem must be tackled. The Government needs to take a leading role. Depaul UK welcomes its commitment to halve and eventually end rough sleeping, as well as its rough sleeping strategy launched in August 2018.

Much more, however, needs to be done. While rough sleeping has always been linked to the availability of accommodation, this report provides more evidence that young people are bearing the brunt of the current housing crisis. Depaul UK will continue to undertake research to identify what else needs to be done, particularly to prevent homelessness.

For now, we call on the Government to do more to address this crisis by implementing the recommendations we make at the end of the report.

1 McCoy, S. (2017) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two. Depaul UK

2 St Mungo's (2016) Nowhere safe to stay: the dangers of sleeping rough. St Mungo's

3 Crisis (2011) Homelessness: A silent killer

4 St Mungo's (2018) Dying on the streets: The case for moving quickly to end rough sleeping
June 2018

SUMMARY

Part One of this report presents, in their own words, 10 young people's experiences of sleeping rough. They were among 12 young people interviewed while living in Depaul UK's supported accommodation projects or using support services in Greater Manchester, Sheffield, Tyneside and London. Their accounts bring to light the terrible hardships that hundreds of young people sleeping rough across England face every night⁵, as well as their resilience and determination to get their lives back on track:

- In one interview, a young woman explained that she first slept rough at the age of 14. After leaving care, she did not receive support from services until she had been sent to prison at her own request.
- One young man explained how after a serious motorcycle accident, requiring him to take two weeks off to recover, his employer dismissed him, leading to him losing his flat and sleeping on the streets.
- A young woman described how, after escaping an abusive partner, she spent three-and-a-half years living on the streets, with no support from local authorities or her family.

Most of the young people interviewed faced difficulties in accessing private rented accommodation, which made it more difficult for them to avoid and escape from homelessness. In the second part of this report, these testimonies are supported by new findings that, in the 40 local authorities with the highest number of young people sleeping rough, there is little or no private accommodation available for young people relying on housing benefit.

The report makes recommendations about ways in which the Government can ensure more accommodation is available to young people who may otherwise sleep rough. The recommendations set out how the Government could:

- invest in accredited emergency hosting services;
- increase the level of financial support available to young people, particularly through the shared accommodation rate of housing benefit; and
- work with private and social landlords to make more housing, including supported accommodation, available to young people at risk of homelessness.

⁵ Official statistics show that 369 people aged under-25 slept rough across England on any one night in the Autumn of 2017, up from 288 in 2016; and that 625 people aged under-26 slept rough in London in the year up to April 2018; See <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>, and <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2017>

YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES OF SLEEPING ROUGH

These interviews were undertaken in April and May 2018 with young people staying in Depaul UK's supported accommodation projects or using support services.

Information on how they were conducted is provided in the Annexe at the end of this report. A brief summary of common themes that emerged from the interviews is provided on page 21.

BECKY, 23



'[The council] will give you a list of private landlords. You have to ring them and if you haven't got the money for a bond, you can't get a flat, can you?'

Becky, 23

I grew up in care from the age of 12 'til the age of 16. I didn't realise I had a drink problem then. You know, I just thought I was just a normal teenager. It wasn't every single day. It was binges. I thought it was just, like, what people my age do. I knew I liked drink and then I started not liking it about two years ago. I think that's when I realised it was getting a bit of a problem. I've been in rehab and stuff. It's getting better.

I had got a house off the care home. It was like a support kind of house, but I ended up getting chucked out because I was drinking. They just thought I was a lost cause.

They shouldn't really put a 16-year-old in a flat on their own. I asked the council if they would help us and they said no, because I had made myself intentionally homeless. I had nowhere else to go. I didn't have any family. I didn't really have any friends.

The police were badgering the social services to say I needed to be put in a secure unit to keep us safe from drinking and they wouldn't have it. So I ended up sleeping rough for a couple of months.

It was horrible. I had to go to the soup kitchens right next to the church in the town. It was freezing. You hardly got a wash. It was disgusting. You didn't know who you were sleeping next to. Everyone was full of drugs. It was just awful.

My Auntie took us in. I was sick. I told her I had been sleeping rough, but I hadn't spoken to my family members for years anyway. I think it was a bit of a shock from

me turning up at the door and tell her what had happened. She wasn't happy about, like, me Mum letting me sleep rough. She took me in for a while. I think she just felt sorry for me. I was there for a year and then I started getting in contact with the rest of my family.

When I was living with my Grandma, I got pregnant and social services got us a place to live for about 18 months. My baby's dad wasn't around. My Mum helped with the baby.

I'm on the council list, so just waiting on properties at the minute. Just waiting for the right one to come along. [The council] will give you a list of private landlords. You have to ring them and if you haven't got the money for a bond, you can't get a flat, can you? Some of them don't accept people on benefits. Some of them want a deposit and a bond upfront which is a grand. Some of them it was like over-25s they wanted. They wouldn't accept under-25s.

**Social Services later removed the baby from Becky's care*

JOHN, 22



'Monday morning I come in, he kicked me out, fired me. I became street homeless then.'

John, 22

So my Dad passed away a few years ago. My Mum tried to stay on in the house. I was in my own accommodation but it was under my mate's name. I went back to my Mum's house, to look after her because she suffers from mental health problems. Then she was in hospital for about a year and a half. They took the house off my Mum when she was in hospital and they took me into court saying that I was living at the property when I actually wasn't.

I was working. I was doing, like, cash in hand, off the books. It was, like, going around delivering fruit and veg. It was long hours but it was money, wasn't it?

I was staying in the back of a van. No one at work knew about that and I was staying on mates' sofas and stuff like that. The boss found out and he was like: "You can stay in the store room." And I was like: "Oh, all right then." But then we got a new manager who did not like it. The new manager wanted me out, so he said: "Right, you got three days to find a property or that's it, you're fired." Monday morning I come in, he kicked me out, fired me. I became street homeless then.

I was sleeping rough for about seven or eight months. It was me, my partner and my little brother what was homeless, all together. When we were on the streets, we wouldn't sleep. We thought: "We'll try and hide there", going inside McDonald's, trying to get your head down. You're not allowed to do that. Trying to get some food to eat, that's when you had to turn to dodgy stuff like taking a couple of sandwiches here and there.

I tried to get a cash-in-hand job in car washes to get some clothes, just to try to pay for some hotels, you know? Like one night, two nights. We stayed in tents. We went to a quiet area, in a posh area, but they don't like us hanging around there.

There are always risks and dangers, you can get robbed. You get idiots on the street just following you. We was at a place where you can get food and there were people who had drinking problems. They're dead aggressive and my missus had just had a miscarriage. Then they got well aggressive to her, and we got barred for it as well. For me, it was really trying to keep [my girlfriend and my little brother] safe.

Before I become homeless, I was doing drugs but since I become homeless I stopped it all. My missus stopped drinking. My little brother has stopped the drugs, because our main focus was on food, clothes and trying to get somewhere to stay.

'When I was involved in the criminal activities, I had a place to stay. It's not because I wanted to do it. It's because I had to.'

Samantha, 21

The first time I started sleeping rough was when I was about 14, after my parents split up, and I had a relationship break-up. I just started running away from home because of the situation; I couldn't deal with it.

Sometimes you stay with friends but you know that they have their families to worry about. My friend would sneak me in and we would sleep together on a single bed. You end up just walking around for the whole night, or going into McDonald's. It's not like you can plan your week, or your month. You'll think: "What are you doing next? How am I going to wash my clothes? How am I going to have a bath? Am I smelling today?"

I would have to steal food because I didn't have any money. I was 14, I got caught one time. Social Services found out about me and I lived with a foster family. It was fine. I stayed there for seven, eight months. I moved back in with my Dad for a while, but that didn't work out. So when I was 19 I was sleeping rough for six months.

On the streets you can either be the drug addict or you can be the one providing the drugs. When I was involved in the criminal activities, I had a place to stay. It's not because I wanted to do it. It's because I had to.

For a girl, the way they can get out of sleeping on the streets, they will go and stay with a boy. I know girls that sell themselves for £20, which is really bad. I was in a situation a few times where I just literally ran away from the person because I'm like: "No! I didn't sign up for this. You said you would help me out for the night."

I ended up in a mental hospital. I was just too depressed. The streets, they buried me. At the end of the day, I'm not used to that kind of lifestyle. It's really stressful. I used to smoke cannabis, and drink alcohol heavily. I think that was one of the reasons I ended in the hospital as well.

I did go to the Council once. I was with my bags. I was 19, nowhere to go. I waited a couple of hours and I saw someone, and then I just literally ended up lying underneath the table where they call people, and I'm like: "No, I'm not going. What, you want me to go outside? I'm a young girl. What am I meant to do at night time?"

They asked: "What kind of help do you expect you're going to get from us? We can't help you day to day." I said: "I'm a care leaver. You should be able to do something." They didn't. I literally felt so alone that it still has an impact on me to this day. I still have my depression, I still have my anxiety.

I was back on the streets after that. Then, a person got in contact with me that does organised fraud for a living, but I got arrested and sent to court. When I was speaking to the probation person in the court, she was telling me: "They will probably give you community service." I was like, "Please, I can't do community service. I want to go to jail. I want to know that I have somewhere to stay." So I did three weeks just so that I had somewhere to stay.

Going to prison helped me get into [Depaul UK accommodation]. I went to my probation officer, who sent me to a support service for people who are homeless. I was really happy, and then I came here, and I viewed the place and I was like: "Can I come tomorrow?"

'I just thought this was going to be it now for the rest of my life, at the age of 16.'

Finn, 18

My Nan died when I was 16. I lived with her from the age of three up until I was 16 because my Mum went to prison. After my Nan died, my family separated. It all just started from there really, like sleeping in sheds and tents.

I was rough sleeping for about two months. The longest in a row was two weeks. I didn't go to school because I couldn't get a shower or anything like that. My clothes were dirty. It ends in depression. Three days is the longest I was awake for. It's the fear of getting beat up or injected with drugs.

I have seen videos before I was homeless, of homeless people getting beat up, stabbed and they were injected with stuff while they're asleep. I've never touched a drug in my life. I just waited for my body to shut down, basically.

I just thought this was going to be it now for the rest of my life, at the age of 16. I didn't look for work because of the depression. Just getting up was pretty hard.

I moved to a different place every night, because at night I was in a tent. I didn't sleep near shops or anything like in a town centre. It was winter. I would light fires to stay warm. I worked for a bit, after I was approached by a modelling agency. I was living on the streets at the time.

I stayed with friends and then when they didn't want me there, it would just be the same situation. I would be asked to leave because I couldn't contribute to the bills or because my friends couldn't deal with my mental health. I stayed with my Aunt

for eight months, but she has a boyfriend and three kids. She said it was too much. I've stayed on my cousin's couch, too.

I managed to get benefits, to pay my cousin board. But I fell out with my cousin a lot and then I'd be back on the streets.

Then, because I walked past Depaul on a regular basis, I just came in. I went to the housing first, and then they referred me here. I stayed at Nightstop for a while, until they found my accommodation. I want to train to be a chef.

'Outreach workers would try to get us into a shelter but you have to pay two pounds a night. I didn't have two pounds.'

Jenny, 25

I must have been about 19, 20. I'd been with my partner since I was 16. My partner chucked me out. I went through a couple of stages where he was calling us all the names under the sun, accusing us of sleeping around and stuff and then when he's had a drink all the stuff is believable in his head. He was very controlling.

I was standing at the bottom of the stairs and he pushed us out the door and chucked the bags out after us, after he poured a hot kettle of water all over them. I rang the police. They couldn't find us nowhere because I had no money whatsoever. I was homeless for three-and-a-half years, sleeping in doorways and shops. I didn't know anyone down there.

I tried calling my Mum and she just wouldn't pick up the phone, it just wasn't happening.

The hardest part of sleeping rough was getting my head round being in doorways on Friday and Saturday night when everyone's out clubbing, when they're walking past, especially if they'd had a beer. I don't like being around drunk people when you're in a doorway in a sleeping bag and you have people walking past you.

I'd sleep in shop doorways. On an average day, I'd just sit there all day. Sometimes people would come and sit with me. I wasn't drinking or taking drugs.

It's like: "Why me?" But then you think: "This is how it is. I just have to get used to it."

Outreach workers would try to get us into a shelter but you have to pay two pounds a night. I didn't have two pounds. I approached the council once. They said they couldn't help us. Then they give me an out-of-hours number for homeless and when I rang that number I got told they'd put you somewhere. But when I went in they wouldn't put me anywhere, they were all suggesting places that cost money, like a hotel, and I went: "I've got no money."

After three-and-a-half years, my Mum called me. We sort of like made friends. I was like: "He's chucked us out", and she said: "I'll put the money in your bank, get yourself home." So I ended up getting on the coach, coming home and went to my Mum's.

But my Dad was coming round. I went away for the weekend, I came back and he was living there and when I'm there it's just like I'm a stranger in my Mum's house. When I was on the streets I felt like I had freedom and when I'm back at my Mum's it's like living under her roof, under her rules and then we start arguing and so I got in touch with my social worker. Then I moved into the YMCA and they put me in touch with Depaul.

PAIGE M., 23



'I came home and found all my bags packed and [my step dad] says: "You're out."'

Paige M., 23

I went to live with my Dad when I was aged 12, then came back later. My Mum said: "If you don't come home, you won't see your sister." That made it harder, and I lost my Dad after that. Mum didn't let me see him.

At the age of 16 I got kicked out of my Mum's house by my stepdad, and it was horrible. We used to get on brilliantly, and everything just deteriorated. When my little sister came along, I got pushed out. I was the black sheep of the family.

I was working and had just left school and was in college. I came home and found all my bags packed and [my stepdad] says: "You're out." At the age of 16 you don't really want to go through all that. I had nothing and I was like: "What's going on? Why are my bags packed?" And he was like: "See if you can work it out." I said: "Where the hell am I supposed to go? I've nowhere. I am 16 years of age and I am meant to be going to work."

I moved into my Grandma's house for about 18 months. I went back to my Mum's only to find out that my Grandad passed away two days before my 18th birthday. It was very upsetting, because I lost the most important person in my life.

I was so looking forward to being at home for my birthday and being with my family but knowing that there was one person missing, I didn't have a birthday, didn't have nothing. After Grandad's funeral, I went off the rails and got kicked out again. That's when I actually started sleeping on the streets. I slept rough for three months.

It's so terrifying. I find myself thinking: "I am not going to sleep tonight, I can't sleep tonight. What were people going to do to us? What's going to happen? Am I actually going to wake up in the morning? What happens if someone comes up and kills us and stabs us?" And I had no way of getting in touch with people. It's horrible, but I've done it for three months.

The biggest challenge was finding where to sleep at night-time, knowing if it was a safe place. I was sleeping on park benches, underneath trees, I was sleeping anywhere. I moved around.

I even slept in a hospital. It was the coldest night, it was raining. They asked us to leave. I says: "Well, you can't expect us to sleep outside when it's pissing down with rain and I've got nowhere to go." They were like: "Fine, we're ringing the police." The police said: "Just let her stay here one night until she finds somewhere to go. She's got no address. And we can't lock her up because she hasn't done nothing wrong."

I was working but then a month after I left because I couldn't go from sleeping rough to going to work, I couldn't do it. I explained to my boss and it was like: "I can't do it, my situation is really bad. Because I'm sleeping rough, I've got nowhere properly to live." And he's like: "Okay, we'll keep your job and your position is there if you ever want to come back."

'We never signed no tenancy agreement. I got illegally evicted.'

Harry, 18

I don't know why my stepdad had a problem with my girlfriend. He takes it out on my Mum and she's schizophrenic. He kept threatening: "I'll put you in hospital."

My stepdad had this guy who's renting out shared accommodation and it was one room. We never signed no tenancy agreement. I got illegally evicted. I'd recently quit my job and my girlfriend recently lost her job. I was late on rent and I got a text off my landlord. Then he changed the locks on me at twelve o'clock at night, while me and my girlfriend were out with friends.

I slept rough for a week after that. See, if I'm sleeping rough, if I go to someone else's house, it doesn't matter if it's family or friend, I think about their situation and now they've got to think about another mouth to feed, you know what I mean?

I went to a homelessness service and they told me to go back to my mum's house. I went home and my stepdad was eating dinner. He come up to me and slapped my hat off my head and he grabbed me by my neck. He pulled me up off the sofa. Abuse is what I get. I have to sit through it and I keep quiet, I'm there, but I'm thinking about what my body's absorbing. So I worry if I'm bottling it up all inside.

They give me a lift to my Nana's but the next day my Nan ended up in hospital because she's diabetic and her sugar level was way too high.

[My girlfriend and I] went to the Town Hall, the Town Hall referred me to another

charity and they interviewed me and my girlfriend at the same time. I think it was like two days later they called me up and said that I've got an appointment here [at Depaul UK]. So I said: "Okay, I'll go to it."

'I went into the Town Hall because obviously I wasn't living in a tent any longer with a baby in my belly.'

Isobel, 19

I got on with my Mum OK but because we're both girls we did clash a lot. Then I started running away from home. I moved out of my Mum's. I was 16 and I was on the street. I was originally on the street that first time for about eight months. Most of it was on my own. The fact that I was a girl and vulnerable, that is the scariest. The fact that I was 16, I was the youngest person on the street.

So it is pretty scary but then if you've got the right people around you, you know you're safe. I was in all those camps. It kind of brings all the homeless together and protecting each other.

I was sleeping in car parks, I was always in car parks. When I was 16 I got barred from all the car parks because I slept in them that much. I'd either sleep on the stairs or on the actual parking space, just so we didn't get moved.

I then met S. We were in a tent. Because something happened with the police we had to move from there, so we moved [the tent] to his mum's back garden. I was pregnant at this point. I went into the Town Hall because obviously I wasn't living in a tent any longer with a baby in my belly.

I went into the Town Hall and I said I was pregnant. They asked for proof of my pregnancy. I was going mad. "Can you see I'm pregnant?" When I was there I had to go and take a pregnancy test and take it to her. That's actually what I had to do. When they found out I was pregnant, it took them an hour-and-a-half to two hours to sort somewhere.

They got us both in accommodation for five days. We got a two-bedroom temporary accommodation house.

Because I got depression, I always feel tired and things like that. Like, I lied to the doctor when I had my little girl. I told him I didn't have depression because I was convinced they were going to take my child off me. I think ahead of things.

I'm trying to come off [drugs]. I'm working with a drug service. I'm working with them at the moment to try and get me a place in detox. It's like a hospital to bring you off drugs. Obviously I can't go for a housing association gaff now, so I've got to go private.

PAIGE W., 23



'I still got into trouble because I hung around with the wrong people, got myself into the wrong crowds, got myself into drugs, drinking all the time.'

Paige W., 23

It all started when my Grandma died in 2013. I honestly just went off the rails because she was like my Mam. Honestly, it hurt so much and I just didn't know what to do. The first thing, I went up to the shop, got a bottle of beer, then I drank all that and I went back to my Mam and I can't remember anything.

After that, I just seemed to kick off all the time. I was always drinking, always out with my friends. But I was getting into trouble with the police. My Mam just had enough of it and one day she just kicked us out and I had nowhere to go.

I packed my suitcase and that. I went to my grandma's and stayed there for a bit. I just couldn't do it and I went back to stay with my friend but then her dad kicked her out, so I had nowhere to go.

I stayed out on the streets for three nights, that's it. It was the worst ever. I couldn't be by myself. I had to be with someone. All I was doing was just walking around and doing nothing.

I couldn't go to my Grandma's or my Dad's because they've got no room for us. They don't know that I've slept out on the streets. We didn't even sleep or anything. I was scared in case anything happened. I went down to the beach, I remember, and I slept there.

I still got into trouble because I hung around with the wrong people, got myself into the wrong crowds, got myself into drugs, drinking all the time. I would never go home, I'd always sleep out and go to parties.

Then I'd go out with different people who I wouldn't know. One night I went out and there were all these lads just sitting in this house doing needles. I didn't want to be there. My pal was going: "Are you all right?" I was going: "No, I want to leave now." They were all just injecting themselves. Honestly, I just had to get out of there.

I've been smoking cannabis, the whole lot. Coke. I don't touch that anymore. I don't drink anymore. I can't drink. I try to drink, I'll have three drinks and I'll feel absolutely ill.

Then I got my own flat. That didn't last long. I thought: "Oh, I can have parties." I got evicted within three months. I was getting complained about by the neighbours and everything. I was barred from the council for getting evicted from that flat. I was barred for two years.

Honestly, out of any supported accommodation, Depaul UK was probably the best. I had my best friend living next door to us.

'When you're 17 and staying out there, sleeping rough, there are loads of other people who look at you and because you're so young, you're vulnerable. And they know it.'

Chris, 21

Originally I left home when I was 17 and then I was homeless for at least two weeks. It was just certain relationships with family completely broke down and I stepped away from it. I was in college, studying cooking. After I became homeless, I really deteriorated. My attendance at college went down. I didn't focus on my work at all. I just left it and never went back.

I was sleeping rough for two weeks. I picked a spot under a bridge. I didn't go near other homeless people. I just went down to the homeless services for food. The biggest challenge was actually just getting to sleep. I just didn't feel safe. When you're 17 and staying out there, sleeping rough, there are loads of other people who look at you and because you're so young, you're vulnerable. And they know it.

I used to sit near the fountain and the benches there and then drunk people come over and have a nice chat when they were waiting for the bus. I'd sit there and stay up all night.

Then I got housed in a lodge, which is for the vulnerable and under-18s. From there I managed to get a job and then a girlfriend. I got a new job after my apprenticeship which was customer services. Making money just sat there talking all day. So, things were going good. Had my own bike, a girlfriend, had my own private rented house.

And then I had a bike crash, in June.

I only got small fractures on one arm but I was off for two weeks. Because the job

was temporary, they got rid of me straight away due to attendance. And there was stress in my relationship. Eventually, I was homeless again and then I was sleeping rough for quite a while – about a month.

I found somewhere else to live. It was just a bedsit. And the kitchen was already mouldy. I couldn't walk in it. I had to leave there because people were threatening me. So then I was sleeping rough again.

I thought I'd try a new start and come to Manchester. See if I could start again without the connections, all the trouble and that. Hopefully build it, this time for the better. So I walked from Wigan to Manchester. Quite a walk, took about five or six hours. I had a rucksack and a coat and that's it.

An outreach service put me in touch with Depaul. I've been here three days. Now I've got a fixed abode, I can start concentrating on jobs. I've sorted food out in the days that I've been here. I've got another interview for personal training. All my benefits have started up again.

That was about three weeks ago so it's gone quite quick really. It does actually work, three weeks is a good turnaround.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

Common experiences and themes emerged from the interviews. They create a picture of the circumstances that push young people into sleeping rough, what it is like to sleep rough as a young person and the challenges of escaping the streets.

Some of their experiences are consistent with existing research, but the stories also point to the need for further data collection and investigation. Developing the evidence base on early intervention could help prevent young people from becoming homeless. More widespread street counts and basic information gathering on people sleeping rough would help to reveal the extent to which children are sleeping rough.

Becoming homeless and sleeping rough

Shockingly, a majority of the young people interviewed for this report stated that they first slept rough when they were children. This suggests that local authorities may not be meeting their duties around providing children's care services, leaving vulnerable children to fall through the safety net.

Relationship breakdown, bereavement and leaving care all acted as triggers that contributed to young people sleeping rough. These circumstances are consistently identified in research as precursors to young people becoming homeless⁶. Among the young people we spoke to, relationship breakdowns were linked to abuse, parents separating, the arrival or return of an absent parent or step-parent, or the birth of a new sibling.

Another factor that pushed young people into rough sleeping was unstable and poorly paid employment. Irregular hours, low pay and sudden termination of employment all made paying rent difficult and contributed to the end of tenancies.

There were missed opportunities for services to intervene while the young people, often children at the time, were becoming homeless. In some cases, public services explicitly refused to offer assistance. In other cases, schools and colleges may have been able to identify that young people were, or were at risk of, becoming homeless.

Living on the streets

The amount of time that young people had spent rough sleeping varied significantly. Some had slept on the streets only once. Others had rotated between street homelessness and different kinds of informal and formal accommodation over a number of years. The shortest, uninterrupted period of rough sleeping reported was three days. The longest was three-and-a-half years.

The experience of sleeping rough took a heavy toll on young people's mental health and wellbeing. Lack of sleep, depression and low self-esteem were repeatedly mentioned by those interviewed.⁷

Previous research by Depaul UK has shown that most young people who are homeless but not rough sleeping experience harm, including assault, abuse, crime, exploitation and damage to their mental health, with groups including LGBT young people, young women, and young people with mental health problems or disabilities particularly at risk.⁸

The fear of violence, robbery or sexual assault was also raised consistently by interviewees. The young people, particularly young women, felt that their age made them more vulnerable to being harmed. In search of safety and warmth, several tried to sleep in buildings that were open all night including hospitals and fast-food restaurants.

6 Watts, E. E., Johnsen, S., & Sosenko, F. (2015). Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Review for The OVO Foundation. Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University

7 For more information on the relationship between rough sleeping and mental health see St Mungo's (2016) Nowhere safe to stay: the dangers of sleeping rough, St Mungo's

8 McCoy, S. (2017) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two, Depaul UK

Escaping rough sleeping

At the time of interview, none of the young people we interviewed were sleeping rough. They were all living in Depaul UK-supported accommodation and using support services, which they were referred to by local authorities. Some had also stayed in Nightstop services for a short period of time.

Though young people's experiences of seeking support from local authorities were mixed, all had eventually been helped to find housing. Some, however, had also been turned away without effective support. Others felt that they had been treated with a lack of respect, including the young woman who had been asked to take a pregnancy test and show the results to an advisor. This is also consistent with previous research, which has found that the assistance offered to people who are homeless by local authorities was inconsistent and often lacking.⁹

Most of the approaches made by the young people to local authorities took place before the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) came into force in April 2018. The HRA places greater responsibility on local authorities to provide support to people who are homeless or threatened by homelessness.

Local authorities have previously raised concerns that Government welfare reforms, particularly cuts to housing benefit, make it harder for them to find accommodation for people threatened by or experiencing homelessness.¹⁰ The National Audit Office has stated that it is likely that welfare reforms such as the capping of housing benefit are partly responsible for the increase in homelessness.¹¹ These concerns were supported by the experience of young people we spoke to and are explored further in the next section of this report.

Barriers to young people finding private rented accommodation

Several of the young people faced barriers to renting private accommodation. Finding and maintaining tenancy in this type of accommodation could have prevented the interviewees from having to sleep rough in the first place. Private rented accommodation may also have been an appropriate route out of rough sleeping for some of the young people. The barriers were around the cost of accommodation, the shortfall between this cost and housing benefit, landlords' unwillingness to let properties to young people and difficulties in maintaining a tenancy.

Becky, 23

"I'm on the council list. So just waiting on properties at the minute... They will give you a list of private landlords. Obviously I didn't have money for a private flat. Some of them don't accept people on benefit. Some of them want a deposit and a bond upfront which is a grand. Some of them it was over-25s they wanted."

Jenny, 25

"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."

Isobel, 19

"I'm just looking on the internet [at] the moment, but I've got staff to try and find me accommodation online that you don't need a guarantor for, because obviously I don't have a guarantor. There are not many that accept housing benefit and that's a problem."

Chris, 21

"It's expensive, in housing benefit it was near enough covered. It was more the bills. There should be an after-care team which just comes and checks in on you, really."

⁹ See St Mungo's (2016) Nowhere safe to stay: the dangers of sleeping rough, St Mungo's; and Dobie, S., Sanders, B. and Teixeira, L. (2014) Turned Away: The treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England, Crisis

¹⁰ Communities and Local Government Committee. Oral evidence: Homelessness Reduction Bill, HC 635 Monday, 5 September 2016

¹¹ Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office (2017) Homelessness

HOW MUCH ACCOMMODATION IS AVAILABLE TO YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF SLEEPING ROUGH?

The young people's experiences show how a shortage of affordable housing can make it more difficult to avoid and move on from homelessness. Young people are sleeping rough, in part, because there is not enough accommodation that they can afford to rent. This section of the report examines how much shared private rented accommodation is available for young people relying on housing benefit in areas with the highest numbers of young people sleeping rough.

We based the analysis on housing benefit because of the links between homelessness, employment and unemployment. The commonly understood purpose of housing benefit is to act as a safety net, allowing people without a job, or on low incomes, to meet housing costs. Low paid and insecure work made it difficult for several young people we interviewed to pay their rent. The inherent instability of homelessness, with young people not knowing where, or if, they would sleep from night to night made working extremely difficult.

We used the shared accommodation rate (SAR) because this is the only type of housing benefit that most single people aged under 35 without children are entitled to claim for private rented accommodation.¹²

We focused on private rented accommodation because this is often the only type of accommodation available to young people at risk of homelessness. Local authority housing teams expect people to use the private rented accommodation sector to resolve housing issues.¹³ Social housing, a possible alternative, is in short

supply and subject to long waiting lists. It is not a realistic option for many young people at risk of homelessness.

It is important to emphasise that shared, private rented accommodation is not suitable for all young people who are at risk of homelessness. It may be inappropriate to expect some young people to share if, for example, they have been victims of domestic violence or abuse. If available, shared and self-contained social housing may offer more affordable high quality accommodation than the private rented sector.

Many young people who have experienced homelessness, especially those who have slept rough for extended periods of time, need intensive support to overcome issues that contributed to their becoming homeless, and may have developed as a result of being homeless. This support may be better provided in supported accommodation projects. Supported accommodation is also in short supply; in 2016, two thirds of projects reported that they had turned people away because they were full.¹⁴

Recommendations for making more types of housing available to young people are included at the end of the report.

¹² Some young people are exempt from regulations that limit them to the SAR, and so are able to claim the one bed rate of housing benefit. Existing exemptions include those for care leavers aged under 22, some offenders and people who have lived for three months in a homelessness hostel.

¹³ Reeve, R.; Cole, I.; Batty, C.; Foden, M.; Green, S. and Pattison, D. (2016) Home: No less will do Crisis, Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University; and Gousy, H (2016). Home: No less with do. London: Crisis.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2017>

The Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) and rough sleeping

In April 2018 Depaul looked at the 40 areas where Government statistics showed three or more young people sleeping rough on a single night.¹⁵ We looked at how much accommodation was available in these areas to people claiming the SAR.¹⁶ A table showing the results for each local authority area is shown on the next page.

We found that:

- There were official counts and estimates of 225 young people sleeping rough on a single night across these 40 areas, but only 57 rooms were accessible to SAR claimants (45 rooms on Rightmove and 12 on SpareRoom).
- If one area (Nottingham) is excluded from the analysis, there are 35 rooms available in the 39 remaining areas (26 rooms on Rightmove and nine on SpareRoom).
- In 19 areas we could find no rooms accessible to people claiming SAR, though there were 128 young people counted or estimated to be sleeping rough each night across these areas.

¹⁵ MHCLG (2018) Rough sleeping in England: autumn 2017.

¹⁶ The research method for this report is explained in the Annexe.

Table One: Rooms available within the SAR, in areas with at least three young people counted or estimated to be sleeping rough. Data retrieved by Depaul, 18/04/18 - 20/04/18.

Local authority	Region	MHCLG 2017 street counts and estimates of rough sleeping, people aged 18-25	Highest Shared Accommodation Rate (SAR) in area (per month)	Properties available to young people sleeping rough within highest SAR	
				Rightmove	SpareRoom
Totals		225	-	45	12
Hillingdon	London	21	£391.16	0	0
Milton Keynes	South East	16	£303.34	0	0
Camden	London	15	£629.36	0	0
Westminster	London	12	£629.36	1	0
Brighton and Hove	South East	9	£359.18	0	0
Bristol, City of	South West	9	£301.52	2	0
Southend-on-Sea	East of England	9	£298.87	0	0
Southampton	South East	7	£293.30	2	0
Tunbridge Wells	South East	7	£336.28	0	0
Cornwall	South West	6	£309.42	3	0
Luton	East of England	6	£279.44	0	0
Bournemouth	South West	5	£284.53	0	0
Leicester	East Midlands	5	£266.71	1	0
Manchester	North West	5	£292.00	1	1
Medway	South East	5	£305.60	0	0
West Berkshire	South East	5	£352.57	0	0
Basildon	East of England	4	£284.22	0	1
Croydon	London	4	£426.01	2	0
Derby	East Midlands	4	£255.59	0	1
Eastbourne	South East	4	£291.13	0	0
Havant	South East	4	£319.72	0	1
Maidstone	South East	4	£305.60	1	0
N. East Lincolnshire	Yorkshire & Humber	4	£228.13	1	0
Nottingham	East Midlands	4	£299.82	19	3
Swindon	South West	4	£276.79	0	0
Tameside	North West	4	£292.00	0	0
Torbay	South West	4	£275.92	0	1
Bedford	East of England	3	£278.31	0	0
Cheltenham	South West	3	£305.90	3	0
Cheshire East	North West	3	£308.08	4	1
Crawley	South East	3	£356.05	0	1
Huntingdonshire	East of England	3	£349.88	0	0
Oxford	South East	3	£360.52	0	1
Telford and Wrekin	West Midlands	3	£295.00	2	0
Thanet	South East	3	£283.18	0	0
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	3	£336.28	0	0
Welwyn Hatfield	East of England	3	£393.85	1	1
West Oxfordshire	South East	3	£360.52	0	0
Wigan	North West	3	£260.02	2	0
Wiltshire	South West	3	£324.42	0	0

There was a shortage of available accommodation because:

- i) in many of the areas studied there was no, or very little, accommodation on the market within the amounts paid through the SAR; and
- ii) where accommodation was available within the SAR, landlords applied criteria that excluded those claiming the SAR from becoming tenants. The most common exclusionary criteria were that tenants must be in work or be students, and that benefit claimants would not be accepted.¹⁷

This evidence is consistent with Crisis' research published in 2012, which showed that in three locations only 1.5 percent of 4,360 shared properties advertised were accessible to SAR recipients.¹⁸ Research soon to be published, jointly undertaken by Crisis and the Chartered Institute of Housing, will also show that in many areas very little accommodation is affordable to those claiming the SAR.

This lack of affordability reflects the extent to which, in many areas, the SAR has lost touch with actual rents. As is the case for other forms of housing benefit, since 2011 Government policy has been to cut, cap, limit to below-inflation increases and freeze the amount of SAR that young people can claim.

In 2016, the SAR was frozen in all areas for four years, despite continued increases in rents. This freeze has been partly mitigated by the decision, announced in the 2017 Budget, to spend half of the savings generated by the freeze on Targeted Affordability Funding (TAF), which increases housing benefit in areas where the freeze makes accommodation particularly unaffordable. In 2018, the Government used this funding

to increase the SAR in more places than any other type of housing benefit.¹⁹ This is because no other housing benefit is as far below actual rents in as many areas as the SAR (52 areas). The evidence presented in Table One shows that these increases in the SAR have not made sufficient accommodation affordable in areas where young people sleep rough.

¹⁷ Upfront costs are another significant barrier. We did not take these into account in the analysis undertaken above. Rent in advance, usually for a month or six weeks, as well as a deposit, are generally required by landlords. Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness often do not have access to the money needed to pay these upfront costs.

¹⁸ Teixeira, L. and Sanders, B. (2012) No Room Available: a study of the availability of shared accommodation, Crisis.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-housing-allowance-lha-rates-applicable-from-april-2018-to-march-2019>

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE UK GOVERNMENT

Making more accommodation available for young people at risk of sleeping rough

Depaul UK welcomes the Government's new rough sleeping strategy, as well as its commitment to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027. As shown in this report, rough sleeping takes a terrible toll on the lives of young people. Other research has also shown that rough sleeping is extremely expensive for public services.²⁰

The 28 percent increase in young people sleeping rough recorded in 2017 Government figures was higher than the overall increase when other age groups are taken into account. The extremely limited amount of accommodation available for young people in areas where they are sleeping rough may help explain this disproportionate increase.

Making more accommodation available will not, on its own, stop young people sleeping rough; a far broader strategy is required. However, unless more accommodation is made available, young people will continue to end up on the streets and struggle to escape homelessness because they cannot find anywhere affordable to live.

It is also important to note that promising programmes providing support to people affected by homelessness, for example, Housing First-funded or Social Impact Bond (SIB)-funded programmes like Depaul UK's Your Chance,²¹ cannot be implemented without accommodation available that young people can afford.

1) Invest in accredited emergency hosting schemes

The Government should make seed funding available to support new emergency hosting schemes. Emergency hosting schemes prevent young people from sleeping rough, and can help young people to move off the streets. They work by enabling volunteer hosts to give young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness a free warm bed and evening meal for a few nights.

Depaul's Nightstop Network accredits emergency hosting schemes in the UK. Accredited schemes have rigorous vetting and risk assessment procedures in place. In 2017, Nightstop services provided 11,070 nights' sleep. A recent Nightstop evaluation found that the service could have generated savings of over £1.6million for public services by reducing costs related to homelessness.²² Nightstop services are particularly effective when they are provided alongside family mediation services, which can support young people to remain in the family home and prevent them from sleeping rough.

Many young people are unable to access Nightstop. Currently less than half of the local authority areas in England are covered by a Nightstop service.

²⁰ See Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) Evidence review of the costs of homelessness

²¹ For more information on Your Chance, see this blog by Alexia Murphy, Depaul's Executive Director of Services <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/project-focus-your-chance>

²² Depaul UK with Envoy Partnership (2018) More than bednights: An evaluation of the Nightstop Service

Increasing the level of financial support available through the benefits system, particularly SAR

These recommendations draw on those made in a recent report by Crisis on ending homelessness.²³ They would help to make more accommodation affordable for young people at risk of rough sleeping. Additional measures are required to address landlords' exclusionary criteria or the upfront costs of entering a tenancy. These issues are addressed in recommendation four.

2) Uprate SAR to the 30th percentile of rents in all areas

Bringing all SAR rates back to the 30th percentile of local rents, as they were in 2012, would re-establish the link between the benefits system and real rents in an area. It would therefore make significantly more accommodation available across England for young people at risk of sleeping rough.

3) Use Targeted Affordability Funding (TAF) to increase the maximum rate of SAR in areas where there are high numbers of young people sleeping rough, and a gap between SAR and market rents exists

The number of young people sleeping rough could be incorporated into the mechanism used to calculate in which areas the SAR should be increased through TAF. To be effective, the SAR will have to be uprated to reflect market rents, which may mean increasing it by more than the current proportion of three percent.

This measure would be more targeted than Recommendation Two. It will not, however, help young people at risk of sleeping rough in areas that are not targeted. The Government's 2017 rough sleeping statistics show that there was at least one person aged from 18 to 25 sleeping rough on any one night in each of the 146 local authority areas.

4) Expand exemptions to the SAR

Some groups of young people under-25 are already exempted from the SAR and so can claim the more generous one-bed rate of Local Housing Allowance.

Care leavers are overrepresented in rough sleeping and homeless populations. More than a third of the young people at risk of homelessness in Depaul UK's services are in care or are care leavers. Extending the exemption from the SAR for care leavers so that they could claim it at any age would increase the amount of private rented accommodation available to this group. The Government has already stated its intention to review the case for extending the age range of this exemption.²⁴

More people aged 18 to 25 would be supported to avoid rough sleeping if other existing SAR exemptions were also extended so that exempted adults of any age could claim it. Currently, exemptions for some offenders and young people who have stayed in hostels do not apply until they are 25.

New exemptions should be introduced for young people who are not currently exempted from SAR but for whom living in shared accommodation is not appropriate. These could include young people fleeing domestic abuse, some vulnerable prison leavers and people with experience of homelessness who have alcohol and drug dependency issues.

Working with private and social landlords to make more housing available to young people at risk of homelessness

5) Fund private rented access schemes targeting young people

Private rented access schemes work directly with landlords to secure housing for people in housing need. They often use financial or other types of incentives to secure properties from landlords, match potential tenants with each other, provide financial

²³ Crisis (2018) Everybody in: How to end homelessness in Great Britain

²⁴ HM Government. (2016) Keep On Caring: Supporting Young People from Care to Independence

help to meet upfront costs and support tenants to sustain their tenancies.

Some of the funding committed to Private Rented Access schemes in the 2017 Budget should be targeted specifically at young people. Due to the SAR, these schemes would have to work with landlords with shared housing available.

According to a 2017 poll, 81 percent of landlords would be more willing to let to under-35s if bonds or rent deposit schemes were available.²⁵ There are numerous existing schemes using shared private rented accommodation to house people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.²⁶ These schemes should be expanded and replicated

6) Work with social housing providers to secure more housing allocations for young people who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough

The SAR means that people relying on housing benefits aged under 35 have less accommodation available to them in the private sector than people aged 35 and over. Social housing providers could help address this imbalance through allocation policies that make more housing available to young people, especially those at risk of homelessness. By doing this, local authorities could support their own efforts to reduce rough sleeping and housing associations could further contribute to ending homelessness.

7) Work with housing providers to make new shared accommodation available for people on low incomes and for people at risk of homelessness

A longer-term solution to some of the issues highlighted in this report would be to increase the supply of affordable shared accommodation. Analysis by Crisis suggests

that mapping existing provision for low income single adult households in Strategic Housing Market Assessments, updating national planning guidance and setting targets in local homelessness strategies could all help increase the provision of affordable shared accommodation.²⁷

8) Protect the future of supported housing funding

A review of supported accommodation homelessness projects found that two thirds had turned people away because they were full.²⁸ Depaul UK is concerned that the Government's proposed new funding model for short-term, supported accommodation could lead to supply falling further behind demand. The Government's proposals seek to localise funding, making it less secure than the current system, which is based on an individual's benefit entitlement. This insecurity has already led to a reduction in investment for supported housing. Further reductions to the supply of supported accommodation could lead to an increase in homelessness and rough sleeping.

25 Reeve, K. & Pattinson, B. (2017) Access to homes for under 35s: The impact of welfare reform on private renting Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University

26 See Batty, E., Cole, I., Green, S., McCarthy, L. & Reeve, K. (2015) Evaluation of the Sharing Solutions programme. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University and <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2017/nov/22/supportive-shared-housing---solution-for-those-at-risk-of-homelessness>

27 Crisis (2018) Everybody in: How to end homelessness in Great Britain

28 Homeless Link (2017) Single Homelessness Support in England: Annual Review 2016

ANNEXE: RESEARCH METHODS

Research into Young People's Lived Experiences of Sleeping Rough

Depaul UK's Campaigns and Youth Participation Senior Officer undertook a series of individual, face-to-face interviews with young people currently using Depaul UK services who had slept rough.

Feedback was sought internally to ensure that the interview questions were appropriate and in line with Depaul UK's safeguarding duties towards young people using its services. Each young person participating read and signed a consent form before they were interviewed.

In total, 12 interviews were conducted across London, Newcastle, Sheffield and Manchester. Each interview followed a set of approved interview questions, allowing the participant some freedom to focus on aspects of their experience and issues that they felt were most pertinent. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and one hour and 15 minutes.

All the interviews were recorded on an audio recorder. Audio files were transcribed by an external agency, after which the original audio was deleted for data protection and safeguarding purposes. Identifying details in the transcripts, such as locations, names and unique experiences were similarly removed.

The interviews were broken down into themes, which were then reread and analysed in turn to identify unusual experiences and common themes or issues. These thematically organised transcripts then provided the basis for the main body of the report.

Research into Shared Accommodation Rate

1. Forty local authority areas with three or more people aged 18-to-25 sleeping rough retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rough-sleeping-in-england-autumn-2017>
2. Highest SAR in each local authority found using: <http://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/search.aspx>.
3. Monthly rate of highest SAR in each local authority retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/678063/2018_LHA_TABLES.xlsx
4. Properties at highest rates of SAR (rounded up to nearest pound) searched for on: <http://www.rightmove.co.uk/> and <https://www.spareroom.co.uk/>
5. Properties were excluded if advert specified that the room was:
 - not available to people claiming housing benefit
 - available only to students or professionals
 - only available if other rooms in property were rented at the same time
 - was a short-term let for fewer than six months
 - tied to providing services/assistance for landlord



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Depaul UK
Endeavour Centre
Sherborne House
34 Decima Street
London
SE1 4QQ

0207 939 1220

depaul@depaulcharity.org.uk
uk.depaulcharity.org

 @DepaulUK
 @DepaulNightstop
 Depaul UK
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