

# DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place



## **Danger Zones and Stepping Stones:**

### Phase Three

Putting evidence into action to protect  
young people experiencing homelessness

Jamie Rowland & Sarah McCoy, Depaul UK







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# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

As I write, the Covid-19 pandemic is in its second wave. People are sleeping on the streets, the weather is getting colder and emergency accommodation is in short supply. At Depaul UK we are doing everything we can to keep people without a home safe and able to look forward to a future free from homelessness.

Publishing a research report at this time could be seen as an unwelcome distraction, something less urgent that we should do later. I hope that once you've read this report you will realise why we felt we had no choice but to publish it now.

As tens of thousands more young people find themselves out of work, there are worrying signs that youth homelessness is also increasing. We need to make sure that these young people are not forced to sleep in dangerous places.

Sadly, we have a long way to go. Our second Danger Zones and Stepping Stones report showed that young people without a stable home often end up in Danger Zones – and subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse. This report provides yet more evidence of young people facing violence, threats and bullying while in Temporary Living Arrangements.

It doesn't have to be like this. Our two previous reports, also supported by LetterOne, showed that we can provide safe and supportive Stepping Stones that enable young people to move on to find a settled place to live. Building on that evidence, this third and final report goes further and puts forward tools that providers can use to ensure young people are staying in Stepping Stones, not Danger Zones.

While recent steps are welcome, the Government also needs to do more to ensure that young people do not have to sleep in places where they are at risk of being harmed.

I urge you to read the report and consider what you can do. This may well involve using the tools, developed by Depaul, which we have made available alongside the report. Alternatively, it may be by engaging through partnership and investment in our programmes to raise vital funds and important awareness of our work.

This is a time when the pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for those of us working to end homelessness. It has also shown how much we can achieve if we act with determination, urgency and common purpose.

---

Mike Thiedke  
CEO, Depaul UK

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of the third and final phase of Depaul UK's research project into how to better protect and support young people experiencing homelessness. In 2015-16 we embarked on this five-year journey, establishing a new approach to assessing Temporary Living Arrangements – the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model. This has been refined throughout the research and has now inspired the development of a diagnostic toolkit to help protect young people from harm and support them back into stable accommodation.

Throughout our research we have used the term “Temporary Living Arrangements” to denote places young people stay for periods of up to six months while out of stable accommodation. “Service-provided accommodation” means all formal housing solutions provided by statutory or charitable services, such as hostels or small accommodation projects.

The research's first phase comprised a qualitative exploration of young people's experiences of temporary living based on detailed interviews with 18 young people and two homelessness sector academics. We found that phrases like “sofa surfing” and “staying with friends” are misleading ways of describing living arrangements that downplay the risks being faced by young people in temporary accommodation.

The temporary living experiences of the young people interviewed varied greatly, and we found evidence of both safe and unsafe as well as supportive and unsupportive environments. The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model was created as a tool to promote understanding of Temporary Living Arrangements in terms of the level to which they pose a threat to young people's safety as well as their propensity to support them out of homelessness.

Phase Two of Danger Zones and Stepping Stones was a quantitative study involving more than 700 young people. This enabled us to estimate the magnitude of the issues highlighted in Phase One, and identify groups of young people who may be particularly vulnerable in temporary accommodation. In particular, we found that young women, young people from the

LGBTQ+ community, young people who are care leavers, and young people with disabilities and/or mental health issues are particularly likely to experience harm in temporary accommodation. While more than half (55 percent) of the young people responding to our survey had experienced some form of harm in temporary accommodation, this proportion rose to two thirds for LGBTQ+ young people, those who previously had been 'looked-after children', and those with disabilities or long-term mental health issues (66 percent, 68 percent and 67 percent respectively). Young women were more than three times more likely to say they had experienced sexual abuse than young men (19 percent compared with five percent).

Additionally, our findings suggested that young people are more likely to experience harm in 'informal' temporary living arrangements with people they do not know well than in arrangements with close friends/family or service-provided accommodation. However, harmful living arrangements were found to exist in every category of accommodation, so we concluded that no accommodation type can be assumed to be safe for young people without further investigation. In the light of this important finding, the Danger Zones and Stepping Stone Model was refined.

The core of this report, Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Three, comprised further qualitative research with 22 young people and six homelessness professionals. Informed by evidence from the first two phases, we explored what makes a Temporary Living Arrangement harmful by linking specific characteristics of living



arrangements to experiences of harm. We also looked at commonalities between stories of successful move-on to explore what makes a temporary living arrangement supportive.

The young people interviewed described experiences that supported our previous findings, providing accounts of sexual, mental and physical abuse, exposure to harmful levels of substance use, and dangerous physical conditions. Incidents of harm were varied and experienced across the full range of temporary living environments, including service-provided accommodation, such as large hostels and emergency shelters, as well as informal Temporary Living Arrangements, such as staying with friends.

**We found that the following factors increase the likelihood of harm to a young person across all Temporary Living Arrangements:**

- › Previous incidents of harm
- › Power imbalances between the young person and others in the accommodation, particularly the accommodation provider
- › Negative external relationships that are facilitated by the accommodation
- › Exposure to substance abuse
- › Poor or unhygienic living standards, including a lack of space
- › Insufficient security measures

The risk factors identified were found to be highly interrelated, with interviewees' experiences suggesting that as one risk factor increases, so do the others, often through impact on mental health and resilience. This results in a cycle of escalating risk of harm.

**The following factors were found to positively affect young people's ability to move quickly and positively onto more suitable accommodation:**

- › Direct support from individuals within the immediate living environment
- › Access to support from outside the accommodation or from a wider social network
- › Knowledge relating to housing and support options
- › Skills for independent living
- › Stability and clear pathways out of homelessness
- › Practical provisions, such as computers, reliable WiFi and telephone access

As such, living arrangements that provide, or facilitate access to, these factors were found to be the most likely to support young people on their journey towards stable accommodation.

Taken together, the factors we have identified provide a framework for assessing Temporary Living Arrangements in line with the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model. To help put this into practice, we have created three diagnostic tools for use within the homelessness sector: one to help frontline services more effectively assess young people's circumstances at the point of engagement/referral, one for young people to assess their own circumstances, and one to help services improve the temporary accommodation they provide.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Our Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research has provided further evidence to suggest that young people in temporary accommodation can be at significant risk of harm. We have heard shocking stories from young people who have been physically assaulted, bullied, threatened with weapons, and introduced to drugs and alcohol. Young people also described feeling trapped in homelessness by their living circumstances, without access to the support they need to find stable accommodation. Moreover, our findings suggest that assumptions in relation to the safety or supportiveness of living arrangements based on accommodation type are unreliable, particularly when ambiguous terms such as “sofa surfing” or “living with friends” are used.

While there was some indication that certain living arrangements (for instance, living with strangers) may pose a greater risk than others (for example, supported accommodation), we found 'good' and 'bad' arrangements within all categories.

In the homelessness sector, we need to get better at assessing Temporary Living Arrangements so that we can protect young people from harm and move them towards safer, more stable environments. Government, too, has a role to play in improving the support available for young people experiencing homelessness.

**We have little control over the quality of informal arrangements, so our focus must be on:**

- a. identifying those who are at risk of harm within informal arrangements, so that they can be moved to safer environments and
- b. improving the temporary living environments that we can control, i.e. service-provided accommodation.

We believe that the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model, when used with the framework and tools presented in this report, is an effective way to achieve this.

**We hope that our research over the past five years, and the practical tools that it has informed, will prove to be a catalyst for change, increasing our understanding of young people's circumstances, informing better decision-making within the sector and in government and, ultimately, improving the lives of young people experiencing homelessness.**

### **We recommend that:**

Providers of accommodation services and non-accommodation services for young people who are experiencing homelessness should use the diagnostic tools that have been developed. Specifically, providers should:

1. Assess young people's temporary living arrangements using the Temporary Living Arrangement Assessment for Homelessness Services (Tool 1). This will challenge assumptive practice and help providers base their decisions on a more nuanced understanding of individual circumstances.
2. Assess and improve their own accommodation offerings by utilising the Service Provider Self-Assessment (Tool 3). This will enable services to identify possible weaknesses within their accommodation which may place a young person at heightened risk or prevent a young person from taking steps towards suitable accommodation options.
3. Promote, and support young people to use the Young Person's Self Assessment (Tool 2). This will help young people gain a clearer understanding of the realities of the temporary living environment they find themselves in and enable them to communicate this with service providers.

### **Additionally, providers should:**

4. Ensure all young people in their services are taught about housing options and related issues, so that they are equipped to take steps towards more suitable accommodation when they are ready.
5. Actively explore how young people's identities and characteristics may shape their experiences of their services. It is of paramount importance to safeguard young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, young women, those from the LGBTQ+ community, care leavers, and young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties.

### **Recommendations to Government**

Government also has a role in ensuring that sufficient safe, supportive service based accommodation for young people is available, particularly since much of it is publicly funded. The recent publication of the Government's National Statement of Expectations in Supported Housing, as well as a consultation on introducing regulatory standards in accommodation for looked after children and care leavers, are encouraging steps.

The Government, however, needs to go further to meet its commitment to "breaking the cycle of homelessness". Our Danger Zones research reports have shown that there are significant numbers of young people staying in informal, non-service provided accommodation. While we know these informal arrangements often expose young people to harm and trap them in homelessness, their informal nature means they fall outside of any attempts to introduce regulation or oversight.

Most of the 712 people we surveyed for our second report had stayed with strangers, and most of these had been harmed while doing so. Twelve per cent had engaged in sexual activity for a place to stay, and over a quarter had slept rough. We know that young people are sleeping rough and in other dangerous places right now, during a pandemic. The evidence points to a significant shortage of service provided accommodation for young people who are homeless:

1. The Ministry for Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should urgently commit to initiate and lead work with homelessness charities, local authorities and elected mayors to assess the need for youth specific homelessness accommodation services and the extent to which this need is being met.

Our Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research shows that homelessness is inherently risky. While we need to make sure young people without a home have somewhere safe to sleep, Depaul believes that homelessness, including youth homelessness, can and should be ended. To do this we need to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, Crisis research has found that the median average when people first became homeless is 22. [<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/nations-apart-experiences-of-single-homeless-people-across-great-britain-2014/>] Doing more to prevent youth homelessness would make significant progress towards making sure no-one is left without a home, as well as towards meeting the government's commitment to ending rough sleeping:

2. The Prime Minister should act on his commitment to launch a review into the causes of rough sleeping. This should include a specific focus on young people and make recommendations that would reduce other forms of homelessness, as well as rough sleeping.
3. MHCLG should fund and evaluate a national youth homelessness prevention programme, including preventative family mediation services and homelessness intervention in schools and colleges.

# Introduction

In 2018–2019 alone 71,589 young people aged 16 to 24 approached local authorities in England presenting as either homeless or at risk of homelessness<sup>1</sup>. Of this figure 57 percent were not supported into housing, resulting in 41,127 young people being left to independently secure accommodation or possibly experience street homelessness. While these statistics begin to expose the extent of youth homelessness within England, those approaching local authorities for support have been shown to represent a small portion of homeless young people, with many more experiencing ‘hidden homelessness’<sup>2,3,4</sup>. This has prompted an increased focus on young people’s experiences of staying in Temporary Living Arrangements.

The negative impacts of periods of temporary living have been well documented within both academic and sector literature<sup>3,5,6,7,8</sup>, with abusive relationships and substance abuse often being cited as the key risks to young people’s safety during such times<sup>3,5,9</sup>. Research has also exposed the risks to young people of: financial exploitation; disconnect from wider support systems; reduced access to, and engagement with, education and employment; physical and mental health concerns; and increased involvement in crime<sup>3,5,6,7,9,10</sup>.

With evidence of harm to young people staying in temporary accommodation so abundant, it is an area of particular concern for the youth homelessness sector. However, with our extensive experience of the complexities of homelessness, Depaul has become increasingly concerned about the assumptions that lie beneath decisions designed to protect young people. Namely, an over-reliance on ambiguous terms such as ‘sofa surfing’ and inconsistencies in decision-making around who should be prioritised for support. These concerns prompted ‘Danger Zones and Stepping Stones’, a series of studies into young people’s experiences of temporary living.

The first phase of the research was a qualitative exploration of young people’s experiences of temporary living. Interviews with 18 young people and two sector academics informed the development of the ‘Danger Zones and Stepping Stones’ model outlined in this report. The research also provided evidence that interpretation and use of phrases such as ‘sofa surfing’

and ‘staying with friends’ are indeed highly varied, which limits their usefulness when assessing accommodation suitability for young people.

Phase Two was a quantitative study involving more than 700 young people from<sup>22</sup> accommodation services across the UK. Through this research we estimated the magnitude of the issues highlighted in Phase One, and identified groups of young people who may be particularly vulnerable in Temporary Living Arrangements (young women, those from the LGBTQ+ community, care leavers and those with disabilities or mental health difficulties).

Evidence was found that young people are more likely to experience harm in informal Temporary Living Arrangements where they do not know their host well (e.g. while living with strangers) than they are in more formal, service-provided accommodation. Beyond this, however, the likelihood of harm was found to be similar across all accommodation types. This implies that harmful living arrangements exist within each accommodation category and that none should be assumed safe without further exploration.



While Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two gave us some insight into which accommodation types were safer, or more supportive, than others on a collective level, there were still disclosures of harm across all accommodation types, and tremendous variation in terms of the support provided. To keep young people safe, the sector needs a way to measure the suitability of Temporary Living Arrangements on an individual basis, which recognises the diversity and subjectivity we identified during the first two phases of our research.

The third phase of Danger Zones and Stepping Stones attempts to develop this framework through a further qualitative exploration of young people's experiences of Temporary Living Arrangements during the course of their homelessness journeys. Specifically, we have sought to understand what characteristics of Temporary Living Arrangements increase the likelihood of a young person experiencing harm without being influenced by the type of accommodation in question. In line with the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model, we have also explored the characteristics that make a living arrangement effective in supporting a young person out of homelessness and into more secure accommodation.

Importantly, the research aims to put evidence into action by informing the development of three diagnostic assessment tools. We hope these tools will improve how Temporary Living Arrangements are assessed, with the aim of moving young people away from situations that could cause them harm and towards effective support.

As in the previous phases of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research, throughout this report we have used the term 'Temporary Living Arrangements' to denote places young people stay for periods of up to six months while out of stable accommodation. 'Service-provided accommodation' means all temporary housing solutions provided by statutory or charitable services, such as hostels, emergency shelters and small supported accommodation projects.

**'WHEN YOU HAVE NO STABILITY, YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO, WHERE TO GO, WHO TO EVEN TALK TO. DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? YOU CAN BE SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE BUT STILL FEEL LONELY'**

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Imani, 20, North London

# The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model

The findings of both the first and second phase of the research established and refined the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model – a new approach to assessing young people's Temporary Living Arrangements. The aim of the model is to support decision-making within the homelessness sector by preventing judgments based on inappropriate assumptions of what phrases such as 'sofa surfing' or 'staying with friends' mean. Using the model, young people's circumstances are assessed according to the level of risk of harm they may experience as a result of their Temporary Living Arrangement, and the capacity of the Temporary Living Arrangement to enable them to move on to more suitable accommodation.

## The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model categorises Temporary Living Arrangements as follows:



**Storm Shelters:** Young people staying in arrangements which fall into this category are relatively safe from harm, but receive limited support to take steps out of homelessness.



**Stepping Stones:** In Temporary Living Arrangements in this category, young people are kept safe from harm, and are also supported out of temporary living and towards more stable accommodation. This is the ideal Temporary Living Arrangement for a young person to escape homelessness.

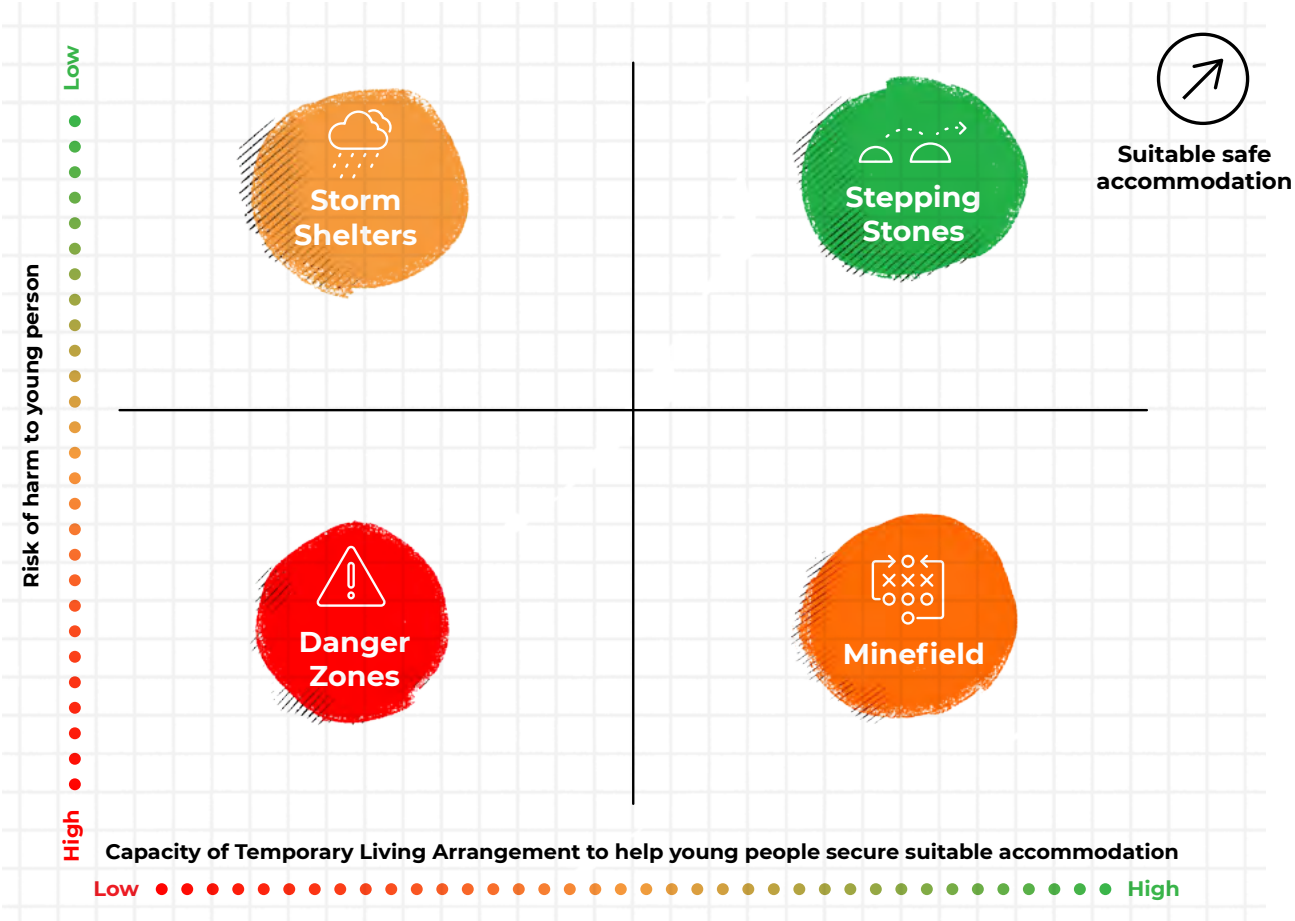


**Danger Zones:** Arrangements in this category pose a high degree of risk to young people's safety and/or wellbeing and young people receive very little support on their journeys out of homelessness.



**Minefield:** While these Temporary Living Arrangements can provide young people with the skills, knowledge and ability to move onto stable accommodation, the level of risk is so high that young people will usually experience harm and/or fail to escape temporary living through these routes.

Figure 1: The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model



# Methodology

## Data Collection and Analysis

A further qualitative approach was used for the final phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research. The findings of the first and second phases informed discussion guides for semi-structured interviews with young people and homelessness professionals. The young people we spoke to had considerable experience of Temporary Living Arrangements prior to being housed with Depaul and the professionals had varied careers within the sector.

The discussion guides sought to encourage the participants to reflect on their time staying in Temporary Living Arrangements (prior to and including Depaul's services), or their professional experiences working within them, to address the following research questions:

1. What are the key factors that influence the likelihood of a Temporary Living Arrangement being harmful for a young person?
2. What are the key attributes of supportive Temporary Living Arrangements that become 'stepping stones' out of homelessness for young people?

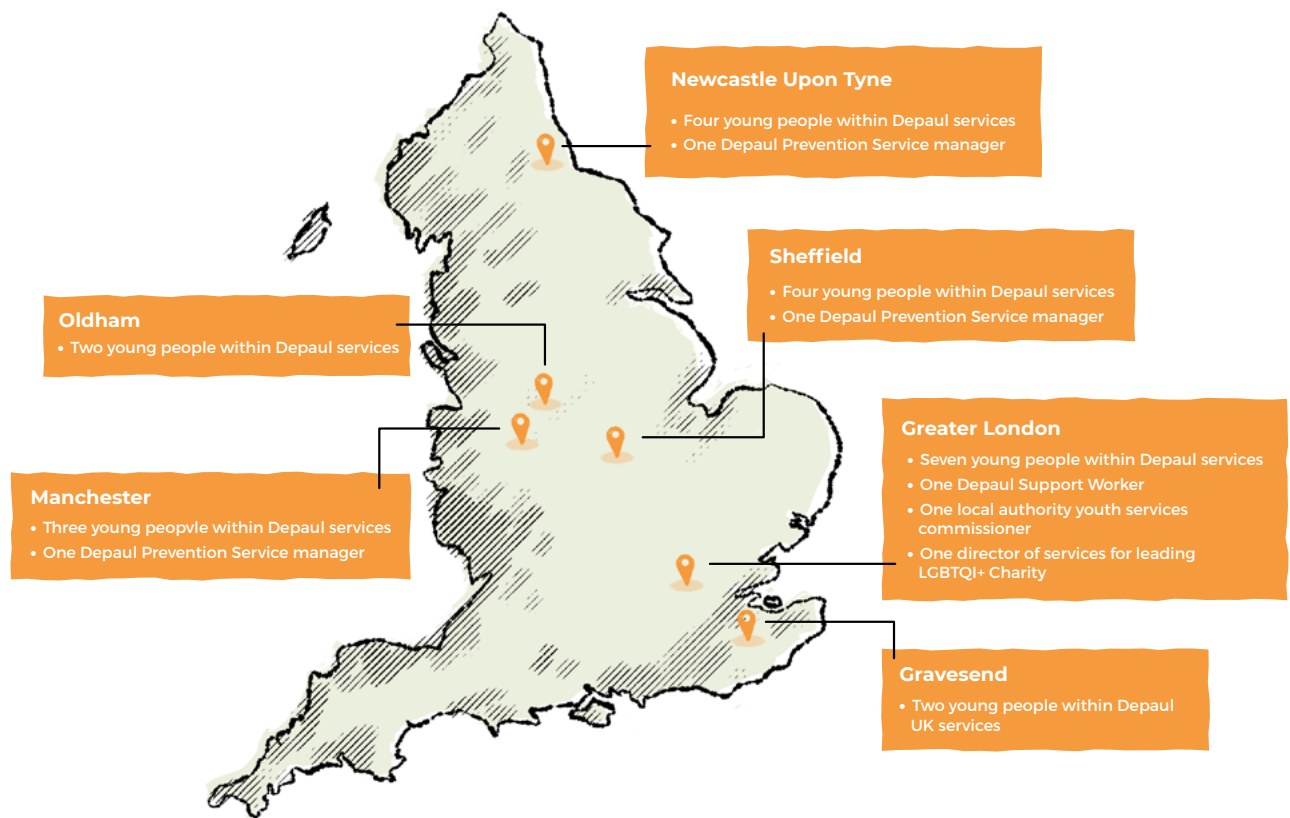
Interviews were carried out throughout March and April 2020 with 22 young people aged 16 to 25 from Depaul UK projects in Oldham, Manchester, Sheffield, Newcastle, London and Gravesend. The young interviewees reflected the ever-present diversity across Depaul UK's projects. Twelve of the young people interviewed identified as male and 10 identified as female. Two were under 18 years of age, 14 were between 18 and 21, and six were between 22 and 25. Fifteen described themselves as White British, six as Black British and one chose not to disclose their ethnicity. Eight of the young people had been in the care of the authorities – a "looked-after child" – for part of their childhood, and two of the participants were living with disabilities.

In addition to the 22 young people who participated in the research, six professionals working within the homelessness sector were interviewed. These interviews provided additional insight into service-provided accommodation. Of the six professionals we interviewed, four worked for Depaul (three as Prevention Service Managers and the other as a Senior Support Worker) and the remaining two worked in other areas of the youth homelessness sector (one as a local authority youth services commissioner and the other as a Director of Services for a prominent LGBTQ+ charity).

The interview data was thematically coded using a combination of inductive codes (which emerged from the data) and priori codes (which were deduced from the findings of the first and second phases of the research). Finally, the data was synthesised and developed into a series of key variables which informed the development of the diagnostic assessment tools (see chapter 5).



Figure 2: Participant locations



## Ethical Oversight

Depaul UK formed an Ethics Committee to oversee the project. The Committee's role was to: provide feedback to the Research Team on research design, processes and documentation; protect and promote the interests of potential and actual research participants; and promote professional responsibility and accountability across all aspects of the research project. The Committee comprised four representatives across Depaul UK's services.

One of the key responsibilities of the Ethics Committee was to review the Ethical Statement produced for the research project. In addition to the Ethical Statement the research also developed a risk assessment, a data protection impact assessment, a consent form for participants to sign and a thank-you letter that was given to the young people following their interviews. These documents can be found in the Appendices.

# Identifying Danger Zones: Understanding Risk, Safety and Wellbeing

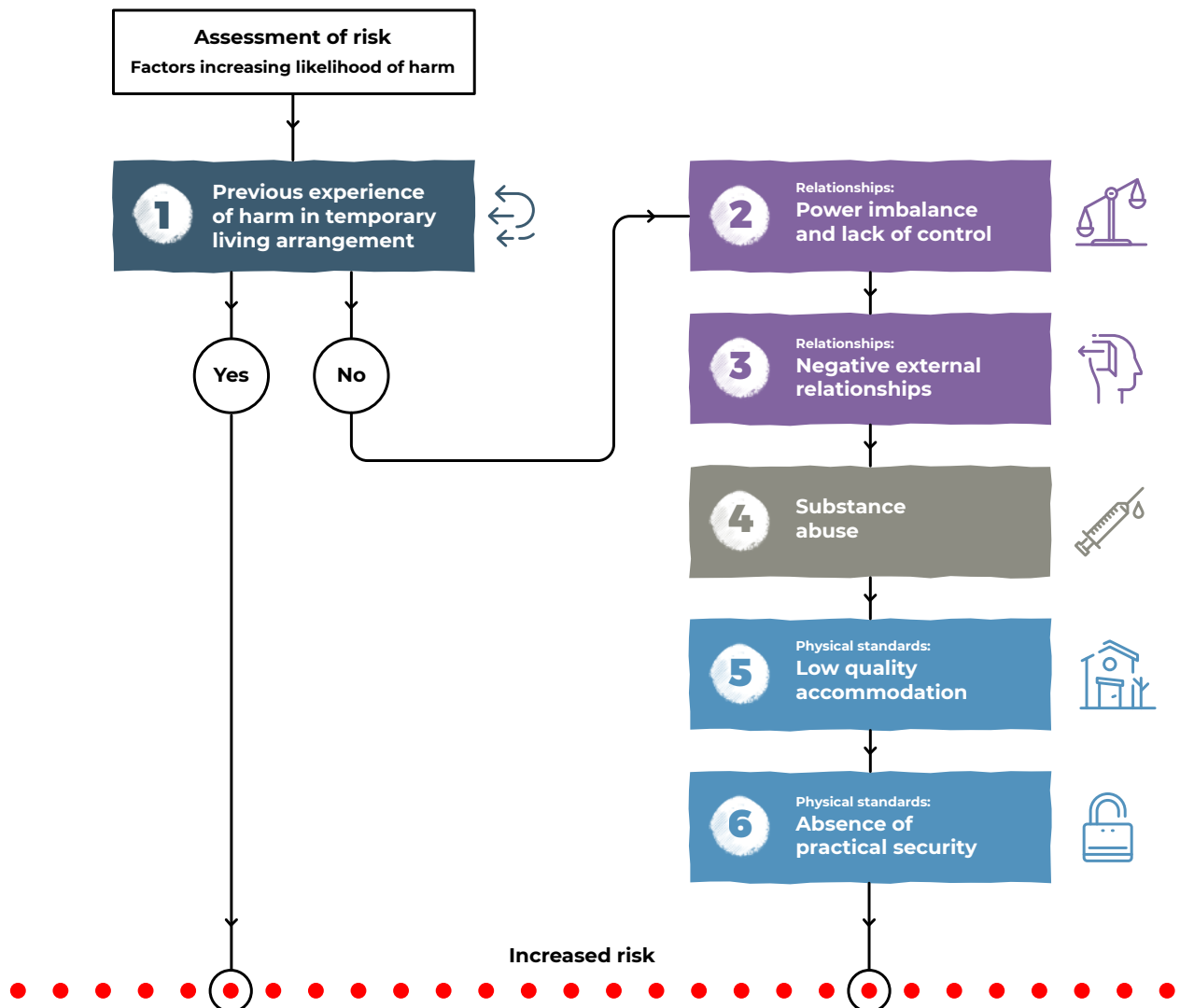
Temporary Living Arrangements have been shown to expose young people to different levels of risk<sup>6,9</sup>. Although our interviews explored a diverse range of lived experiences, common themes emerged in relation to young people's experience of harm while out of stable housing. These themes enabled us to identify a series of factors that significantly impact the likelihood of a young person experiencing harm while in a Temporary Living Arrangement. The risk factors identified were typically shown to transcend the type of accommodation. This suggests that although there are a diverse range of Temporary Living Environments – including large, mixed-needs hostels, smaller, more specialist accommodation services, friends' houses and night-by-night emergency shelters – the same risk variables tend to influence young people's safety within these settings.

## **The responses of the young participants and homelessness professionals we interviewed have informed our approach to assessing the likelihood of risk in two differing ways:**

1. We heard numerous accounts of sustained abuse or harm in Temporary Living Arrangements from participants. This suggests that if a young person has experienced harm within a Temporary Living Environment there is a strong likelihood it will happen again if the young person remains in that environment. For this reason, previous incidents of harm or abuse within Temporary Living Arrangements have been treated as good predictors of future harm.
2. Our analysis enabled us to identify environmental factors that appear linked to incidents of harm in Temporary Living Arrangements. The presence of such factors in a young person's Temporary Living Arrangement has also been considered a predictor of harm.

Using this approach, we have found that the following should be considered when determining the likelihood of harm within a Temporary Living Arrangement. Firstly, whether the young person has experienced harm in that environment before (factor 1), and secondly whether there are environmental factors present in their Temporary Living Arrangement that have previously been associated with harm for other people (factors 2–6). The factors we have identified are shown in figure 3.

Figure 3: Process of assessing risk



## Entrenched cycle of risk

The research found that the risk factors identified are highly interrelated. The experiences of the young participants suggest that as one risk factor increases, so too do the others, creating an ongoing cycle of heightened risk. Similarly, an improvement in one area can lead to improvements in others. With this in mind, it should be noted that positive or negative changes in one area considered in this report can have a significant bearing on overall risk. Furthermore, the connecting element between the risk factors identified was often mental health, with the presence

of one risk factor (e.g. lack of personal autonomy) affecting a young person's mental resilience and leaving them more vulnerable to the negative consequences of others (e.g. exposure to substances). Factors that negatively affect young people's mental health are therefore likely to have an amplified effect on the risk that they will experience harm while in Temporary Living Arrangements.



## Previous experience of harm in temporary living arrangement



### Has the young person experienced harm within the living environment?

Our quantitative exploration of young people's experiences during the second phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research suggested that more than half (55 percent) of young people staying in temporary accommodation have experienced harm while out of stable accommodation. Our research, in line with other studies<sup>3,8</sup>, found that abusive relationships present one of the greatest risks of harm to young people. Three in 10 (29 percent) respondents said they had experienced mental or emotional abuse while in temporary accommodation and a similar proportion (28 percent) experienced physical abuse.

During this third phase of our research, many of the young people who we spoke to described experiences that support our previous findings, providing accounts of:

- › sexual assault or abuse;
- › mental or emotional abuse;
- › or physical assault or abuse.

Incidents of these forms of abuse were hugely varied and were experienced across a wide range of Temporary Living Environments, including service-provided accommodation projects such as large hostels and night-by-night emergency shelters, as well as informal Temporary Living Arrangements such as staying with friends. However, a notable commonality between accounts of abuse was their long-term nature. Young people used words like "always" and "constantly" to describe periods of sustained abuse while in temporary accommodation, suggesting that harm is rarely "one-off", but rather one incident or period of abuse tends to lead to another.

This demonstrates that without a change of circumstances, problematic dynamics between young people and those within their immediate living environment can result in ongoing harm:

**'HE WAS ALWAYS VIOLENT, HE USED TO ALWAYS BATTER ME. I NEVER USED TO DO ANYTHING BUT I DON'T KNOW, IT USED TO MAKE HIM HAPPY, GIVE HIM A LITTLE BUZZ'**

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Riley, 21, North West

The ongoing nature of harm was not limited to incidents of relationship-based abuse. We found that other factors that have a bearing on young people's safety (outlined below) also affect experiences in a sustained way. For example, if there are issues relating to substance abuse in a Temporary Living Arrangement which are resulting in harm for a young person, this is unlikely to change without intervention.

The participants' experiences of sustained periods of harm indicate that past incidents of harm within Temporary Living Arrangements are critical indicators of heightened risk. It is essential that where harm has been experienced and risk remains present, Temporary Living Arrangements are changed or young people are relocated to prevent further harm from occurring.

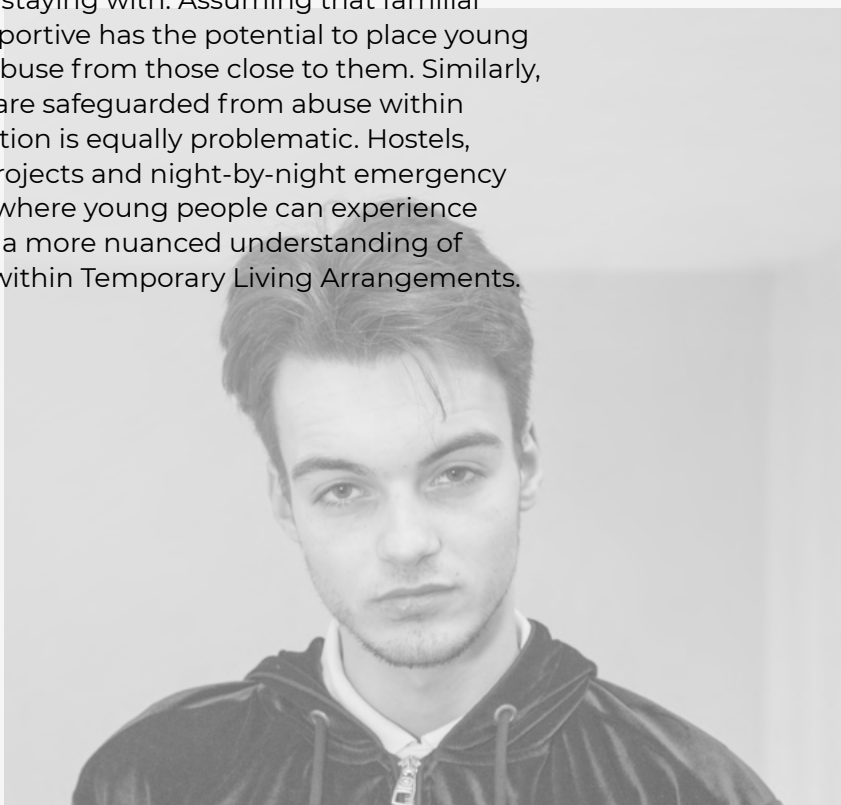


## Relationships and Risk

Our research found that in periods of temporary living, young people have differing experiences of relationships. In some cases, it was necessary for young people to frequently forge new relationships as a consequence of moving from one place to another. In others, pressure was placed on existing relationships as young people became more dependent on friends and family. The relationships young people had with those providing their accommodation, co-residents, and those outside of their immediate living environment were all found to dramatically alter their experiences. Supportive relationships played a vital role in protecting the young participants, while negative relationships often led to high-risk situations and harmful experiences.

To reduce cases of abuse in Temporary Living Arrangements for all young people, not just those who have already experienced harm, it is necessary to identify young people at heightened risk before abuse occurs. For this, we must identify relationships that may make abuse more likely to occur.

A common thread through the findings of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research is that experience of Temporary Living Arrangements, and harm within them, is varied and subjective. For example, our quantitative study found that while risk appears lower when young people are staying with people they know well, almost a third (31 percent) of our sample had experienced harm while staying with family members. In line with this, the experiences of the young people we spoke to suggest that it is inappropriate to assess risk based on the nature of the relationship between young people and the person or people they are staying with. Assuming that familial relationships are safe and supportive has the potential to place young people at heightened risk of abuse from those close to them. Similarly, assuming that young people are safeguarded from abuse within service-provided accommodation is equally problematic. Hostels, supported accommodation projects and night-by-night emergency shelters are all environments where young people can experience abuse. Assessing risk requires a more nuanced understanding of young people's relationships within Temporary Living Arrangements.



As noted above, the incidents of abuse described by the young people we interviewed were hugely varied. Abusive situations arose at varying points in the young people's journeys through homelessness and there was little evidence to suggest commonalities between those subjecting young people to harm. Notably, there were examples of abusive behaviour from those who had close relationships with young people (e.g. family members or friends) as well as from those unknown to them prior to their experiences of homelessness. One young woman shared a harrowing experience of abuse while temporarily staying with her father:

*"I went through a period where he would hit me a lot, threaten me with weapons and tell me disturbing things that he had planned. I tried to overdose when I was at his house."*

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Clara, 17, South London

Others shared similar experiences of abusive situations from those they had pre-existing relationships with:

*"I didn't feel safe in the same house as him... he would lash out at me constantly."*

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Chloe, 19, North East

The experiences of the young people we interviewed showed that abuse from others within service-provided accommodation was not uncommon. Many of the young participants reflected on ongoing conflicts they had with co-residents in large, mixed-needs hostels:

*"I got kicked out of that place. So I basically got attacked by some big guy and obviously he was saying that I provoked him, I had to leave innit. Do you get me? So at that point then I was homeless for another three months."*

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Jake, 23, North London

*"I was still young at the time and I was surrounded by a group of 30-year-old blokes who'd just come out of prison. There was a bit of bullying."*

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Jack, 20, North West



## 2

### Relationships: Power imbalance and lack of control



#### Does the young person feel powerless within the living environment?

*“I just think there’s that potential if there’s that sort of power dynamic that kicks in when you’re in somebody else’s space, that does make you vulnerable to perhaps being taken advantage of in many different ways.”*

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Depaul Prevention Services Manager,  
North West

While the experiences of young people were varied, situations that led to abuse were likely to be underpinned by a common factor – power imbalances between young people and those they were living with. As such, we suggest that the presence of these power imbalances is an indicator of heightened risk that should be explored.

Young people often stay in informal Temporary Living Arrangements for free, so a sense of dependency is to some degree inevitable. However, our findings suggest that these imbalances can be managed in differing ways, with some young people feeling respected and free within the environments where they are living temporarily, and others feeling dependent, coerced and controlled.

Power imbalances in Temporary Living Arrangements often stem from a host’s ability to remove the young person from their accommodation, whether this is through eviction in more formal arrangements or ‘throwing them out’ of a less formal setting. This creates a threat of street homelessness that is very real. In some cases young people were reassured by welcoming hosts who gave them a sense of security, but in others the threat of homelessness was used to gain control over young people.

Our research suggests that in some instances, the threat of homelessness can create an environment where young people are less likely to verbalise issues they may be facing and more likely to compromise their boundaries. This has the potential to leave them at heightened risk of emotional abuse and manipulation. Two young women, who were temporarily staying at their friends’ houses, specifically reflected on how power imbalances within these informal settings placed them at increased risk of street homelessness:

*“Like they could turn on you at any point, they could tell you to fuck off in the middle of the night at anytime, at any point.”*

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Tanisha, 23, North London

*“She pushed me out of the door and locked it. She literally left me out there. It was dark, it was cold.”*

---

Kirsty, 20, North London

A young man also reflected on a similar situation of powerlessness he had experienced in a large, mixed-needs hostel prior to placement within Depaul services:

*"They came in like they were police officers with gloves and that, they literally flipped all of our rooms and everybody's room got stripped out. Beds taken out, clothes taken out, going through our personal stuff and all of that to check if we had drugs and everything in it, which is illegal. Do you get what I'm saying? But if we said something, then we get evicted from the building."*

---

Jake, 23, North London

While there were examples of harmful power imbalances from young people of all genders, the young women we spoke to were particularly likely to have experienced abusive relationships as a result of power imbalances with their partners:

*"I couldn't leave his house because he didn't like the fact I would go for some air. He would go to his mum's but lock the door. I was literally isolated in one room."*

---

Chloe, 19, North East

*"At that time I was so young. I wasn't aware of it but I was in a very controlling relationship."*



**'FEMALES ARE DEFINITELY MORE AT RISK. WHEN SOMEONE IS VULNERABLE AND THEY HAVE NOWHERE TO GO, IT'S EASY TO FALL INTO THOSE TRAPS. I'VE HEARD IT A LOT BEFORE, PEOPLE GETTING TRAFFICKED BECAUSE THEY'RE VULNERABLE'**

---

Kirsty, 20, North London

*"Definitely young women [are at greater risk] because there are risks for them in going into shared accommodation... things happen to women in shared accommodation or they're not feeling safe."*

---

Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London

Particularly in a congregate living environment, age appears to be another factor that can lead to harmful power imbalances. One young man, who had spent time in a large, mixed-needs hostel at a younger age, articulated how he was susceptible to abuse due to imbalances of power with older residents:





*"It's a 150-person hostel. There are people from my age all the way up to 35. If you're not strong minded, people will take advantage of you. It's slightly like a prison in a way. You can't look like a weak person in that sort of place because you will get eaten alive by these people."*

---

Jake, 23, North London

The young people and homelessness professionals we spoke to felt that having a strong sense of autonomy, independence, and privacy during periods of temporary living is essential if harm is to be avoided. Young people's need for autonomy and independence while in temporary accommodation has been evidenced in wider literature<sup>12,13</sup> as well as our own research. While freedom to express themselves and make autonomous decisions has a direct effect on young people's ability to avoid harm, the impact is also indirect through young people's mental health. Those who felt more in control of their surroundings were more likely to feel positively about themselves, less vulnerable to manipulation, and less likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours:

*"So living on my own, I feel I've got a lot more responsibility in a good way, I feel also it's helped me mature and have more self-respect."*

---

Dylan, 24, North West

While there were overlaps in the ways that the young participants related to both independence and privacy, there were distinctions in how these concepts positively impacted upon their mental health. Independence typically allowed young people to maintain self-worth, develop maturity and exercise control over their lives' while privacy meant young people felt respected and gave them the opportunity to evaluate their situation within Temporary Living Arrangements.

*"I've got my key to get in and out. I've got my responsibilities of being there. I think that's what really makes you feel, like, positive being there generally. There's no, like, threat of harm at all."*

---

Tyler, 19, North West

*"The young women there, they have privacy, there's still support in sight, but they have their own front door, their own privacy, and I think that does wonders to their mental health, and just allowing them to breathe and sort of take stock."*

---

Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London

As well as mitigating against heightened risk, one young person noted how having autonomy and independence while staying at a close family friend's home also led to a feeling of belonging within the household. This created a sense of security and stability and reduced the likelihood of harm.

Due to the wide-ranging uncertainties that are prevalent during periods of temporary living, independence, autonomy and privacy are critical in ensuring that young people can maintain a positive relationship with their mental health. The presence of power imbalances, which restrict and control young people, should be considered an important indicator of heightened risk.

*"I could have food all the time and use the TV when I wanted to. It was like my own house."*

---

Jake, 23, North London



## Relationships: Negative external relationships



### Does the living environment expose the young person to damaging external relationships?

During periods of homelessness and housing instability, young people's wider social networks have been shown to influence the likelihood they will experience harm <sup>5, 14</sup>. Many of the young people we spoke to articulated how relationships with those outside of the household, or service-provided accommodation, had a significant impact on their safety while in Temporary Living Arrangements.

In line with experiences of abuse within Temporary Living Arrangements, we found no clear commonalities between perpetrators of abuse from young people's wider social environment. In some cases young people were harmed by people they knew prior to experiencing homelessness, while others came into contact with their abusers for the first time during their homelessness journeys:

*"I was always getting messages, calls, spamming me with abuse messages. After a week of being there, my aunt and uncle came to my girlfriend's house and started bashing the door trying to get me."*

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Tom, 18, South East

*"I mean vulnerable in a sense of like, yeah, I guess so, because it was like this guy upstairs that would come to the flat door randomly or like, wait in the elevator for us."*

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Clara, 17, South London

Incidents of abuse from those outside the immediate living environment appeared to be more common when young people were living in informal accommodation (e.g. with friends) than in more formal arrangements. The risk was, however, present across all accommodation types:

*"Yeah the kids would try to boot the door down, waiting for people to come out and have a cig so they can run in and terror it. They'd smash the windows on the hostel."*

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Ben, 24, North West

Our previous research has indicated that during periods of housing instability, young people can resort to staying with people they do not know <sup>7</sup>. This results in them having limited control over who they come into contact with in their immediate living environments. The young people we spoke to who had had similar experiences described how this made them vulnerable:

*"Her friend used to come over a lot and he's in a gang, he's just not a nice person. If he got upset, he'd pull out a knife."*

---

Sarah, 18, South London

*"I've never used drugs before but that was what she was doing. She used to invite people to her house that I didn't trust, I just didn't feel safe."*

---

Jasmine, 19, North London



Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds tend to be over-represented in homelessness statistics<sup>15,16</sup>. There is little existing literature exploring the impact young people's ethnicity has on the level of risk they face during periods of temporary living; however, it has been suggested that those from ethnic minority backgrounds face heightened risk due to the relative socio-economic disadvantage they experience<sup>4</sup>. Nearly all young people from ethnic minority backgrounds that we interviewed described incidents of harm or feelings of vulnerability that directly related to their ethnicity, including one young woman who had temporarily stayed with extended family:

**'MY AUNTIE AND MY COUSINS ARE QUITE RACIALLY AGGRESSIVE AND ABUSIVE. THAT CAUSED A LOT OF PROBLEMS FOR ME, THEY WERE QUITE PERSISTENT WITH THAT'**

---

Kirsty, 20, North London

As well as experiencing direct forms of racial abuse, some of the young people from ethnic minority backgrounds were exposed to gang activity. This heightened risk in relation to gang activity, specifically within service-provided accommodation, was highlighted by a homelessness professional:

*"Young black men are quite at risk... you can be placed in a supported housing service and another young person there might be in a gang, the young person himself might not even be in a gang, but confrontations can start ... If you're even in the wrong area and you're a young black man, it can be quite dangerous."*

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Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London

A young man we spoke to, who had previously been placed in a large, mixed-needs hostel provided further support to the concerns raised by the homelessness professional:

*"That was heavy, there were a lot of gangs. A lot of people getting stabbed in that place [large, mixed-needs hostel]."*

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Jake, 23, North London

Our findings suggest that the intersectionality of young people's socio-political identities has the potential to impact and shape the nature of the risks that they may be exposed to. While ethnicity may a driver of risk for many young people, others may experience racially driven risk in combination with risks relating to their gender or sexual orientation. A homelessness professional who worked for a leading LGBTQ+ charity described the vulnerability of young people from ethnic minority backgrounds who are also members of the LGBTQ+ community:

*"We do get experiences that young people share with us, of things that they've experienced as somebody of colour, that are shocking. And I think that's a huge group of young people who are discriminated against and are finding themselves in situations that are no fault of their own."*

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Service Director, LGBTQ+ Charity



While young people from all backgrounds were susceptible to harm as a consequence of negative relationships with those outside of their immediate living environment, we found evidence that positive external relationships can actively reduce the likelihood young people will experience harm while in temporary accommodation. Many of the young participants explained how the ongoing support of wider social networks, including family and friends, had played a critical role in safeguarding their mental health during periods of temporary living. This, in turn, made them more resilient against factors that may otherwise lead to harm:

*"I think just having people around you that you know you can talk to. With me it was always my cousins, they helped me a lot. Like moving from my mum's, to my mate's, to my aunt's. It's just like having a family there that makes me feel safe."*

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Dwayne, 22, South East

**'IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THEM (YOUNG PEOPLE) TO BE ABLE TO JUST KNOW, OH, IT'S OKAY IF THIS GOES WRONG. I'M NOT GOING TO HAVE NOBODY, LIKE I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOT FEEL LIKE LOST, YOU KNOW'**

---

Kirsty, 20, North London



The experiences of the young participants, as well as the insights of the homelessness professionals, encourage a more holistic exploration of risk that takes into consideration young people's wider social networks as well as the relationships they hold within the immediate living environment.

Temporary Living Arrangements can serve to exacerbate or mitigate against risk relating to external relationships. For example, living arrangements that enable young people to remain inconspicuous and/or allow them to stay hidden from people with whom they have negative relationships, can reduce risk. Whereas Temporary Living Arrangements that draw attention to young people or put them in dangerous social contexts will have the opposite effect.

## **Substances and Risk**

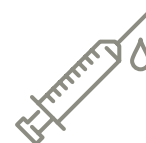
Substance abuse has frequently been shown to have a highly damaging impact on young people during periods of housing instability 5, 16, 17. Our research supports existing literature with the finding that the risk of harm is greater in environments where young people experience heightened exposure to substances. This was the case in both informal and service-provided Temporary Living Arrangements.

Many of the young people we spoke to were introduced to substances for the first time when they fell out of stable accommodation, meaning that Temporary Living Arrangements were often gateways to substance abuse. While each individual related to substances in different ways, the young people we spoke to typically felt that the presence of substances within Temporary Living Environments led to heightened personal risk.





## Substance abuse



### Does the living environment expose the young person to substances?

Existing evidence suggests that many individuals use substances to deal with the on going trauma of homelessness and to gain confidence in dangerous new environments<sup>17</sup>. Our findings support this evidence and suggest that within Temporary Living Arrangements exposure to substances can lead to harm by:

- › creating substance abuse issues for those without previous exposure;
- › exacerbating pre-existing substance issues; and
- › surrounding young people with people who are under the influence and therefore pose a threat.

*“The drugs that went around there was a mad ting, like the type of drugs I got introduced to like were party drugs and all of that...in that place [large, mixed-needs hostel], that kind of environment you’re in, you want to take more.”*

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Jake, 23, North London

*“I was smoking, like, a lot and I got into a habit of drinking as well. I don’t even like drinking like that, but I was drinking there [friend’s house] and smoking a lot”*

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June, 22, North London

*“It was a very rowdy place [mixed-age, emergency, night-by-night shelter], where people had nothing to lose. People weren’t bothered if they beat you up or robbed you, because they’ve got nothing to lose.”*

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Ben, 24, North West

The harms young people described that resulted from substance abuse in Temporary Living Arrangements were varied, including physical and verbal abuse from others, a general sense of vulnerability and loss of control, as well as damage to personal relationships. One young man struggled to maintain employment while temporarily staying with his family. As a result, he developed a cyclical dependency on alcohol, which placed a strain on his relationship with his mother:

*“It became a pattern where every time I’d lose my job, I’d go back to drinking, and eventually the drinking got so bad that my mum just sort of said, ‘you know, you can’t do it anymore’.”*

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Dylan, 24, North West



While young people who personally abused substances within Temporary Living Arrangements appeared most at risk of harm, our research indicates that this personal use is frequently led by the behaviour of others. Many of the young people we interviewed were peer-pressured to use substances by those within their immediate living environment, and acquiesced, due to imbalances of power (with hosts or co-residents), specifically in informal living arrangements:

*"She drank a lot of alcohol, from morning till evening and sometimes she would try to peer-pressure me into drinking."*

---

**Sarah, 18, South London**

*"I was just basically there because I had nowhere else to go ...it was basically turning into a drug house, like she was really depressed. She started taking pills and that...I've never used drugs before, but that's what she was doing."*

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**Jasmine, 19, North London**

This suggests that young people housed in environments where substances are being abused are at increased risk of developing personal issues and, therefore, experiencing associated harms.

While the damaging impacts of substance abuse have typically been associated with periods of 'hidden homelessness' research has also suggested that substance abuse is also a threat within service-provided accommodation <sup>4</sup>. Several of our participants felt that their young age left them susceptible to substance abuse as a means of gaining social confidence and inclusion. This was particularly identified as an issue by participants who had spent time in large, mixed-needs hostels and emergency night-by-night shelters prior to being placed in Depaul services:

**'I WAS VERY QUIET AS A CHILD SO WHEN I'D TAKE COCAINE I'D BE CONFIDENT, NO ONE WOULD CONFRONT ME AND I LIKED THAT'**

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**Ben, 24, North West**

*"I was easily fooled when I was younger. I was constantly around people smoking weed, taking drugs and drinking and I thought this feels like the life, these are my boys."*

---

**Jack, 20, North West**

In some cases such environments also led to young people experiencing substance-related harm without their consent or knowledge. One young man reflected on his experience within a large, mixed-needs hostel:

*"I'm sitting down with these people thinking that they're my mates and they're giving me roll-ups and they're spiked with spice."*

---

**Riley, 21, North West**

A homelessness professional added weight to the interviewees' lived experiences by articulating how the entrenched needs of young people within large, mixed-needs hostels can often lead to the exploitation of others:

*"They might be living with, you know, young people who were quite entrenched in terms of substance use or offending... there's a lot of criminal exploitation."*

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**Depaul Prevention Services Manager, North West**



Just as the presence of substances within Temporary Living Arrangements increased the risk of harm, our research suggests that the absence of substances combined with the presence of support services was a key risk mitigation factor. Many participants reflected on how specialist support relating to substances had allowed them to challenge addictions:

*“Before I moved here [Depaul UK supported accommodation] I used to smoke a lot of weed. And now, I’ve smoked basically nothing compared to what I did. I don’t even drink really at all. And I think it’s all because you have them there and the help that they give you.”*

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**Dwayne, 22, South East**

*“Advertising support systems that are available is really important. Narcotics Anonymous or mental health support is so important and having someone that’s positive there, that’s really important, they make you feel safe.”*

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**Ben, 24, North West**

A resident based at one of Depaul’s small, supported accommodation projects articulated how the absence of substance use within the immediate living environment was helping him to avoid taking drugs:

*“It’s not full of people who are taking the drug that I take because I want to stay off it now. And it won’t be easy for me to stay off it if people are running around here sniffing all the time and they don’t, which is good.”*

---

**Riley, 21, North West**

Although specialist support services relating to substances were only present within service-provided accommodation projects, several young people in informal arrangements commented on how support had helped them to avoid or address substance-related issues:

*“I think because I was around my mum and little brothers a lot, that stopped me from drinking, I’d only drink when I wasn’t happy.”*

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**Dylan, 24, North West**

The experiences of the young participants highlight the critical role substances play in determining the likelihood of harm within a Temporary Living Arrangement. Exposure to substances can result in direct harm, but it can also negatively impact upon young people’s mental health. This increases the likelihood that they will engage in high-risk behaviours and lowers their resilience against other threats to their safety. As such, determining the extent to which young people are exposed to, and use, substances within the environment they are living is an essential element of any risk assessment.



## Accommodation standards and Risk

The young people we spoke to highlighted the extent to which the physical environment in which they were staying impacted their safety. Poor accommodation standards not only presented risks to the participants' immediate physical health, they were also shown to exacerbate mental health issues. This in turn led to high-risk behaviours and vulnerability to other factors related to potential harm. Conversely, hygienic, psychologically-informed environments were seen as protective, typically leading to improved, or at least maintained, mental and physical health.





## Physical standards: Low quality accommodation



### Are the physical standards of the living environment suitable for the young person?

The standard of the physical environments within which we live have been shown to have a huge impact on our physical and mental health<sup>3</sup>. Poor physical standards across both service-provided accommodation and informal Temporary Living Environments were identified within our research as a further indicator of heightened risk to young people.

Reflecting on where they had stayed throughout their homelessness journey, participants described the rooms within some service-provided accommodation, prior to placement within Depaul services, as very small, with more than one participant comparing where they had stayed to a “prison cell”. Several of the young participants articulated how this lack of personal space had negatively impacted on their mental wellbeing.

*“My room was a box. It felt like a prison cell, it was so small. My head was spinning I was confused, I was angry.”*

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Tanisha, 23, North London

*“It just felt like you were in a prison or you felt like you were in a mental asylum”*

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Jake, 23, North London

Lack of space was also an issue for those staying in informal settings. However, while the problem in service-provided accommodation was restricted personal space (e.g. small rooms), in informal arrangements young people often found themselves without any private space at all, sleeping on sofas in communal areas. As noted above, when discussing power imbalances, the degree of privacy and autonomy a young person has – which is highly related to the amount of private space they have in a Temporary Living Arrangement – has a significant impact on their vulnerability to other risk factors and, therefore, the likelihood they will experience harm.

*“It never felt like I actually lived there because I was sleeping on the sofa in the living room for about a month.”*

---

Dylan, 24, North West

Additionally, low levels of hygiene across both service-provided accommodation and informal Temporary Living Arrangements posed a direct risk to young people's mental and physical health. One young man specifically reflected on the poor standards of hygiene within a mixed-needs, night-by-night, emergency hostel he was placed in:





## 'IN THE SHOWER, THERE WERE HEROIN NEEDLES AND ALL OF THIS STUFF FULL OF BLOOD'

Jake, 23, North London

Another young woman, who was temporarily staying with family friends, also highlighted how the physical condition of her bedroom was inappropriate:

*"I went into the room, there were literally like maggots in the carpet."*

Tanisha, 23, North London

One homelessness professional also reflected on how a supported accommodation project she had been involved with had failed to establish a positive living environment for young people due to the poor physical standards:

*"It's not particularly homely or psychologically informed and it just doesn't lend itself to feeling like a home."*

Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London

When reflecting on the positive characteristics of Temporary Living Arrangements, many of the young participants explained how having suitable, hygienic environments increased their sense of wellbeing and, therefore, reduced the likelihood they would experience harm. Specifically, young people living in Depaul's dispersed, self-contained projects articulated how these environments were having a positive impact on their lives:

*"I'm in a flat. It's a very nice flat. In fact, it's very big, it's just had a new kitchen fitted, I've got space to cook, I've got a proper cooker. Yeah, it's much better."*

Joseph, 21, North West

*"I've got a separate kitchen and bathroom so it's like, it's kind of a flat but it's not. I feel settled there because it's my own."*

Amelia, 20, North West

In line with this, a homelessness professional articulated how high-quality living environments encourage young people to feel proud of where they live, and as such, refrain from engaging in high-risk behaviours:

*"I think all our properties should be to that standard, somewhere that young people are really proud of and want to look after. I think that's the reason there's been hardly any incidents in the service as well, because the young people are really proud of their homes."*

Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London



The lived experiences of the young people we spoke to supported the views of the homelessness professionals and provided further evidence that small things, such as cleanliness, can improve experiences, which in turn decreases the likelihood of harm. Even in larger mixed-needs hostels, which were typically described as high-risk environments by the participants, the cleanliness of the building had the potential to improve their day-to-day experiences:

*“It’s very comfortable, it’s very clean in that place. It’s a massive warehouse and it was like you had three dorms. One was the girl’s dorm. Two is the boys, but it was like bunk beds, but they washed it every day.”*

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Jake, 23, North London

*“When I first thought I was going to a hostel, I thought it’d be scary and dirty, but it’s quite hygienic.”*

---

Sarah, 18, South London

Our research has shown that the physical conditions in which young people are staying while out of stable accommodation have a significant bearing on the likelihood they will experience harm. The degree of personal space a young person is provided with, as well as the cleanliness of the environment, appear to be particularly important areas for consideration.



Physical standards:  
**An absence of practical  
security measures**



**Do the security measures within the accommodation protect  
the young person from harm?**

In addition to unsuitable living conditions, young people frequently connected the absence of practical security measures to heightened risk. A homelessness professional reflected on how the lack of staffing in a large, mixed-needs hostel increased the likelihood of high-risk incidents:

*"It isn't staffed with, sort of, support staff at night. They'll have, like, security, and I just don't think that provides the level of support that is needed, and I think it allows risky situations to happen at night."*

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Depaul Prevention Services Manager,  
North West

Young people also spoke positively about security technologies, such as alarms and cameras, stating that such measures helped them feel less vulnerable to harm, particularly in large, mixed-needs hostels for people of all ages, with varied needs:

*"First of all, there's security. There's always security here and there are cameras too which is good. That makes me feel safe. I think if there was no cameras or security I wouldn't stay."*

---

Sarah, 18, South London

*"I especially like the fact that I know no one can just come in. No matter how anxious or paranoid I feel, I know that I'm safe and no one can get in."*

---

Kirsty, 20, North London

**'I THINK IF  
MORE SUPPORTED  
ACCOMMODATION HAD  
CAMERAS LIKE THIS  
PLACE HAS, I THINK  
IT WOULD STOP A LOT  
OF FIGHTS'**

---

Riley, 21, North East

The importance of visible security measures within service-provided accommodation was also highlighted by a key homelessness professional:

*"They've done a lot of work to ensure that the reception area is quite safe and no one could get through without the receptionist knowing."*

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Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London



While the majority of the young participants supported the use of security measures within living environments, it is important to highlight that there was a sense from some that security impinged on their sense of privacy and freedom. One young person articulated how a supported accommodation project's security measures were having a damaging impact on her mental wellbeing:

*"They said you're going to go somewhere where they're going to have a staff at the door, 'What? You have to buzz in?!' Straight away, I got angry. I just got anxiety, I got angry, I got mad, I said, 'no way'."*

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Tanisha, 23, North London

These differences in reactions to security measures within accommodation services highlights the diversity of young people in terms of their needs and preferences. The same conditions can be related to in very different ways. On one hand, visible security measures may mitigate against incidents of harm within service-provided accommodation, while on the other hand, young people's mental health may worsen if they feel such measures compromise their freedom and independence, which may lead to increased engagement in high risk behaviours.

As such, it is important to understand how individuals relate to specific aspects of Temporary Living Arrangements when assessing risk. By unpicking the subjective experiences and perspectives of individuals, rather than making generic assumptions, better decisions can be made.



# Defining Stepping Stones: Young People's Journeys out of Temporary Living Arrangements

After discussing the factors that impact young people's safety in periods of housing instability, we asked research participants to identify characteristics of Temporary Living Environments that facilitate successful moves onto stable accommodation. In this chapter we explore these enablers and provide a framework for assessing how supportive a living arrangement is for a young person facing homelessness.

## What are we aiming for?

The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model was developed following the first phase of this research. It is based on the assumption that temporary accommodation should serve as a means of progression to housing that is more suited to young people's needs. While housing preferences are varied, our experience at Depaul UK suggests there are four elements of 'suitable housing' that are universally desired by young people:

- › **Safety and security:** Young people should be free from all forms of harm where they are living, as well as the threat of harm.
- › **Stability:** Young people should feel stable and in control of how long they can stay in their chosen accommodation.
- › **Life facilitation:** Young people's housing should facilitate success in other areas of their lives (e.g. make it easier to secure and maintain employment) rather than act as a barrier.
- › **Sense of "home":** There are many different interpretations of "home" yet there seems to be a universal agreement that to feel 'at home' where you live is a good thing.

When we discuss "journeys out of homelessness" in this report, we are referring to a young person's progression towards accommodation that embodies the above characteristics. This progression, or journey, may involve a number of moves through different Temporary Living Arrangements, all hopefully an improvement on the last.

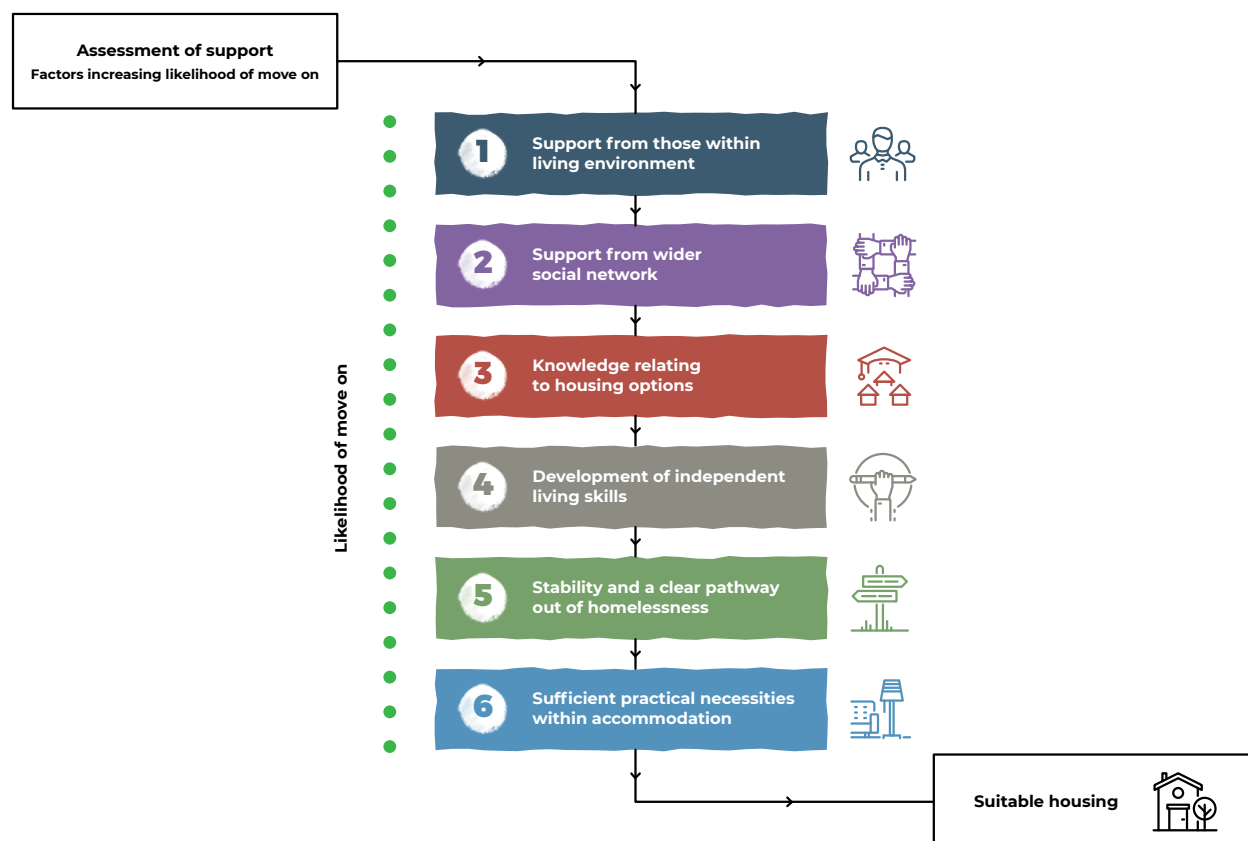
If we relate this to the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model, a young person's aim would be to move to accommodation that puts them in a quadrant that is an improvement on their previous living circumstances. The preference would be a straight transition to a 'Stepping Stone' accommodation that would keep them safe while also providing a high level of support. However, those in a 'Danger Zone' would benefit from moving to a 'Storm Shelter' where support is low, but they are at low risk of harm; or to a 'Minefield' where the risk of harm is high but support to move on successfully is more accessible.

The factors we consider in this section of the report determine how supportive a Temporary Living Environment is to a young person looking to move on to more suitable accommodation. Arrangements described as high support due to the presence of the factors considered will be classed as 'Stepping Stones' or 'Minefields' depending on the level of risk involved. Those described as low support will be in the 'Danger Zone' or considered 'Storm Shelters' also depending on the risk involved. Young people in low support environments are likely to need external intervention to enable them to make progress away from homelessness.

## Identifying supportive Temporary Living Arrangements

It has been shown that as Temporary Living Environments vary, so do their impact on young people's ability to move away from homelessness<sup>7,18</sup>. The stories of participants demonstrate how the unique characteristics of each Temporary Living Environment can either empower young people to take proactive steps to improve their situations, or lead to a sense of entrapment within, what are often high-risk, environments<sup>7</sup>. Drawing on common themes across the interviews, our research has uncovered a series of factors that were found to support young people in their journeys away from homelessness. These attributes were present across a wide range of Temporary Living Arrangements, including informal arrangements with family or friends, large mixed-needs hostels, small supported accommodation projects, and night-by-night emergency shelters.

Figure 4: Move-on assessment process



## **Creating the pathway to progression**

As is the case for the identified risk factors, our research found that the factors which enable young people to move out of homelessness are not experienced in isolation. The young people we spoke to described how the elements discussed worked in combination to create a positive move-on environment. For example, when young people felt stable within a Temporary Living Arrangement, they were more likely to have engaged with support offered by those around them, which in turn enabled them to develop their independent living skills. When the majority of the factors were present within a Temporary Living Arrangement, the young people we spoke to were able to make positive steps on their journey out of homelessness in a timeframe that was appropriate for them.





## Relationships and move on

There is a consensus across the existing literature that support from family members, close friends and homelessness professionals plays a pivotal role in enabling young people to move away from homelessness<sup>7, 19, 20</sup>. Our research found the same and suggests that the level of support that young people receive from others during periods of temporary living varies significantly. Some young people are able to draw on strong connections with family members, close friends and homelessness professionals, which facilitates their journey to stability, while others quickly find themselves becoming isolated, which can prolong their homelessness experience.





## Support from those within living environment



### Is the young person receiving quality support from within the living environment?

Our findings suggest that of all the relationships young people may have during times of housing instability, those they have with people within their immediate living environment have the greatest impact on their ability to take steps into more appropriate accommodation. Supportive relationships within the immediate living environment typically empowered young people to not only identify appropriate pathways out of homelessness, but also to take practical steps to improve their situations.

Within informal Temporary Living Arrangements, the young people we interviewed looked to others for advice on suitable housing options, practical support in attending key appointments, and guidance when looking online for alternative accommodation:

*"I found out about hostels from his dad. I never knew there was somewhere where young people could get help and he told me that I could find one."*

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Sarah, 18, South London

*"The house was good, there was a routine, it was stable. Her mum used to help me go online and search for places and people who could help."*

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Tanisha, 23, North London

**'HIS PARENTS WERE LIKE FAMILY. THEY WERE ALWAYS TAKING ME TO COUNCIL MEETINGS, ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR THINGS FOR ME'**

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Jake, 23, North London

The positive experiences the young people had within informal Temporary Living Arrangements support wider studies which emphasise the important role that others play in enabling young people to move on to more suitable housing<sup>20</sup>. Notably, however, our research suggests that family members and friends are often instrumental in supporting young people to move from informal Temporary Living Arrangements to service-provided temporary accommodation, rather than into more permanent housing. While this is often assumed to be a progression, this research series has shown that it is not always the case. The degree of variation within housing categories means that some informal arrangements can be more suitable than service-provided options and vice versa. When determining progression, the most important thing is the presence – or lack of – factors considered in this report, rather than the type of accommodation or who provides it.

As well as highlighting the key role of family and friends in young people's progression, research has focused on the impact of support workers within service-provided accommodation<sup>13, 18</sup>. Our findings suggest that where strong relationships are forged, support workers play a critical role in supporting young people into more suitable accommodation:

*"She could relate to us and we would listen to her because we actually liked her. She was always helping us with move-on, paying rent, making sure we went to meetings. She was very good at her job."*

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Jake, 23, North London

*"I feel much more supported by support workers from Depaul. They're honest with you, they're nice but they tell you the truth at the same time. It's like they understand."*

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Joseph, 21, North East

As illustrated by these quotes, the young people valued honesty from support workers. They also described how active encouragement had enabled them to start taking control of their own circumstances and progress:

*"I go to the staff and they are really pushy but in a supportive way."*

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Oscar, 20, North East

*"It's important having support workers you know. They give you that boost and let you know that you can't sit around all day."*

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Dylan, 24, North West

Conversely, when asked to identify the main barriers preventing them from successfully moving on from a Temporary Living Arrangement, the young people we interviewed felt that a lack of support – or sometimes active discouragement – from those around them significantly held them back. This was an issue within some service-provided accommodation and in particular larger mixed needs hostels and emergency night-by-night shelters. In these environments young people anticipated support from homelessness professionals, but sometimes did not receive it:

*"They're just not trying to move people on. They'd rather just keep people there. Not once did I have a meeting. I was there for a period of four years and got kicked out. Not once did they come and give me a meeting about moving on."*

---

Jake, 23, North London

*"I just remember constantly being frustrated. A caseworker's job is to move us into accommodation but I was constantly going back and getting the same outcome every time. I wasn't getting any progress."*

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Jack, 20, North West

Lack of support from those within the immediate living environment was also identified as a barrier to move on within informal living arrangements. One young woman who had temporarily stayed with a near-stranger explained how her limited connections within the household made it difficult for her to think about finding somewhere more suitable to live:

*"I had no one else to, like, speak to. I didn't have anyone else around me at the time."*

---

**Jasmine, 19, North London**

As highlighted by the first phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research, even when young people feel a strong connection to their hosts and they are free from harm in a Temporary Living Environment, this does not mean they will be supported to move on successfully. In some cases hosts are unaware of young people's situations and in others they lack the knowledge to support them effectively. Relating this to our model, such Temporary Living Arrangements would be described as 'Storm Shelters'.

The experiences of the interviewees demonstrate the critical role that others play in enabling young people to progress on their journeys out of homelessness. Importantly, we found huge variation in the level of support young people received while in service-provided accommodation. Where strong bonds were formed with support staff, many young people felt empowered to secure stable accommodation. But there were also examples of young people feeling isolated and trapped within service-provided accommodation. The level of support young people receive within the immediate environment should be seen as a key indicator when attempting to understand the likelihood that a young person will move on to more suitable accommodation.



## Support from wider social network



### Does the living environment help the young person build positive external connections?

The relationships young people held across their wider social networks were also found to have a significant impact on their ability to progress into more suitable accommodation. Our findings suggest that young people with strong relationships outside of the immediate living environment – specifically with family, friends, and members of the community – are more likely to move on positively. In environments where direct support is limited, this outside involvement was very important. Several interviewees described how positive relationships with those outside of their immediate living environment had enabled them to move on from high-risk, informal Temporary Living Arrangements to more secure accommodation:

*“The whole time I was there I was in contact with the social services. Also her family and someone from a church in Sevenoaks were making sure that they found me a place as soon as possible.”*

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Tom, 18, South East

*“I went to my old youth club called Streetwise and the lady there was giving me information.”*

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Sarah, 18, South London

Support from outside the immediate living environment was an important enabler of progress, not only for those living in informal arrangements. Many young people living in service-provided accommodation also looked for external support, especially when the support they received from within the accommodation was lacking. One young man, who was living in a mixed needs hostel, looked to his family for support when attempting to secure accommodation more suitable to his needs:

*“My connection with my dad and gran was good. Even though I wasn’t staying with them, they were still trying to help me. They were going out of their way to do things and get me on the up again.”*

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Dylan, 24, North West

The importance of young people’s wider support networks was also identified as a key move-on enabler by a homelessness professional:

*“There are probably wider support networks as well. So they have got access to people who perhaps will be able to guide and support them in where to go. They might be able to even help practically with things like you know, taking them to appointments.”*

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Depaul Prevention Services Manager, North West



In contrast to the positive experiences many young people reflected on, others described how a sense of isolation while in Temporary Living Arrangements had made it more difficult to take active steps to move away from homelessness. A lack of immediate access to professional support within informal Temporary Living Arrangements, meant that this is where the negative impacts of isolation were most sharply felt:

**'I FELT LIKE THERE WAS NO ONE THERE TO MOTIVATE ME. THERE WAS NO ONE THERE LIKE PUSHING ME TO DO BETTER. LIKE BECAUSE OF THE WHOLE SITUATION, I WOULD JUST KIND OF LAY IN BED EVERY DAY AND NOT DO ANYTHING'**

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Kirsty, 20, North London

*"I didn't really have anybody when I was there [ex-partner's family home], I didn't speak to my friends whilst I was there."*

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Clara, 17, South London

The lived experiences of the young people who we spoke to, as well as insights offered by homelessness professionals, supports existing evidence that recognises the pivotal role wider support systems play in enabling young people to escape homelessness<sup>21, 22</sup>. Our findings show that when considering whether a Temporary Living Arrangement is likely to support a young person out of homelessness, it is important to consider not only the direct support available to young within the living arrangement, but also the extent to which the environment facilitates, or restricts, access to external sources of support. When direct support is unavailable, the environments which facilitate positive external connections are more supportive to young people than those that do not. As such, an exploration of young people's wider support networks must feature in any assessment of their situation while in temporary living.





## Knowledge relating to housing options



### Does the living environment help the young person learn about their housing options?

The young people we spoke to felt that having a good knowledge of youth homelessness services, the housing sector and the benefit system were of critical importance when attempting to take steps towards suitable housing. Several described being “clueless” when first falling out of stable accommodation and how their lack of knowledge had resulted in them staying in unsafe places when there may have been safer alternatives available:

*“You don’t have a clue what you’re doing, you’re pushed into a world where you have no idea what to do.”*

Rosie, 21, North East

**'THERE SHOULD BE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT GETTING KICKED OUT BECAUSE A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE DO GET KICKED OUT AND WHEN THEY DO, THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO'**

Sarah, 18, South London

*“I didn’t know I could get into a hostel or something, I didn’t know that. I didn’t know enough. I’d never done it before.”*

Joseph, 21, North East

Once in Temporary Living Arrangements, our findings suggest that those who had access to information regarding their housing options were more likely to move on from high-risk environments in a shorter period of time.

The young people we spoke to gave several examples of support staff in service-provided accommodation helping them identify suitable pathways to accommodation more appropriate to their needs:

*“They help you with your housing and just they help you get on the bidding list. I’m doing my bidding now even as well. They helped quite a lot with that. Now I’ve got my bidding up and running.”*

Dwayne, 22, South East

One homelessness professional also described in detail the attention staff at his organisation give to educating young people:

*“Our staff will spend time with young people showing them how things like Spare Room works or talking to them about the properties that they’ve looked at, going over what you need to look for in privately rented accommodation, what the danger signs are... is it like mouldy? what are your rights and entitlements?”*

Service Director, LGBTQ+ Charity





There were also examples of hosts in informal arrangements providing young people with essential knowledge to help them progress. One young woman who was temporarily residing at a friend's flat explained how learning about specialist 16-25 hostels had enabled her to take steps towards a safer living environment:

*"I wanted to find a hostel because I found out about hostels from my friend's dad... I knew about women's refuges and stuff like halfway houses, but I never knew there was something for young people to get help, and he told me that I could apply for one."*

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**Sarah, 18, South London**

As we found in the first phase of Danger Zones, the knowledge that hosts have in relation to housing and homelessness, and their capacity to provide information to young people, varies enormously. In some Temporary Living Arrangements young people will have access to very little information. This might be, for example, due to relationships within an informal arrangement or lack of resources in a service-provided setting. In these circumstances young people tended to do better when they were resourceful enough to find alternative means of accessing information. For example, one young man who initially found himself in a high-risk, mixed needs hostel, was able to move on to one of Depaul's dispersed accommodation projects after exploring his options at a local library:

*"I used to spend quite a lot of time at the local library and there was quite a lot of information there provided about housing."*

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**Dylan, 24, North West**

Any assessment of whether a Temporary Living Arrangement is likely to support young people out of homelessness should consider whether it helps them learn about the sector and their options. However, it is important to recognise that even when support was high, and young people had access to professionals with extensive knowledge, young people's lack of personal understanding of the sector was sometimes a barrier to them moving on successfully. For example, many of the young people we spoke to had automatically assumed that the private rented sector was their only option when they fell out of stable accommodation. Due to their age, personal circumstances and lack of knowledge, they typically struggled to secure tenancies, or fell into badly maintained, sub-standard properties. In time, this led them to discount the private sector as a long-term option. One participant explained how young people within service-provided accommodation chose not to explore private rented options due to past experiences of rejection:

*"A lot of people are scared to ask about accommodation just in case they get turned down."*

---

**Amelia, 20, North East**

Our findings suggest that when young people fall out of stable accommodation and have a limited knowledge of their housing options they are more vulnerable to being exposed to high-risk situations for longer periods of time. Moreover, a poor understanding of housing options can be a barrier to successful move-on. This demonstrates a need to ensure young people are housed in environments that further their understanding, but also to improve education for all young people so they are better equipped to make safer choices if they lose their accommodation.



## Development of independent living skills



### Does the living environment support the young person to develop independent living skills?

Our quantitative study found that as many as six out of 10 young people residing in Temporary Living Arrangements fall out of stable accommodation before the age of 18<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, our experience working with young people suggests that many of those who are older than this are likely to have grown up in unsupportive environments where little attention has been paid to the development of independent living skills. As such, many young people in temporary environments need support to gain the skills necessary to move to more suitable accommodation, such as personal budgeting, cleaning and cooking.

*"It's hard to do everyday things on your own, yeah. Especially if you are young and you don't have any idea how to do things, like. You want people to help you. Yeah, it's hard."*

---

Shanti, 22, North West

Temporary Living Arrangements that prioritise the development of skills for independent living have been shown to facilitate young people's journeys out of homelessness<sup>13, 23</sup>. This was evident in the experiences of the interviewees, several of whom explained how feeling confident in their ability to live independently empowered them to take steps towards securing long-term housing.

Many of the young people we spoke to had had positive experiences of developing the skills they need within informal Temporary Living Arrangements. For example, young people often received support from their hosts when living with family members or in friends' homes:

**'I STRUGGLE WITH COOKING SHE HELPED ME WITH COOKING AND CLEANING, MORE LIKE HYGIENE AND JUST HOW TO PAY BILLS AND BUDGETING AND STUFF LIKE THAT'**

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Riley, 21, North West

*"They wanted me to make sure my finances were sorted out, they wanted me to make sure that I was independent and acting like an adult."*

---

Kirsty, 20, North London

There were also several examples of staff within service-provided accommodation who had enabled young people to gain the confidence to live independently. Two young people living in supported accommodation projects explained how they felt empowered to live independently as a result of the ongoing support they received from staff:

*"They helped me to budget my money so I've got enough money to last me a month, unlike before where it would be gone within a couple of days."*

---

**Jordan, 22, North East**

*"They make sure we do our washing on time and keep our hygiene. They do cooking workshops and help us to cook for ourselves and help us with a budget plan for our money and pay bills. It makes me feel like I can actually live alone and make sure I pay everything."*

---

**Tom, 18, South East**

Not all service-provided accommodation was seen to support young people to develop independent living skills. One homelessness professional reflected on how a larger mixed needs hostel that provided catered meals was not the right environment for young people to develop the necessary skillset to move onto more suitable accommodation:

*"Because of the way that the hostel is set up with all your meals catered, you're just paying your bills, so you don't really get that real-life experience until you get out of there into independence. And I know young people who have really struggled with that transition."*

---

**Local Authority Youth Services  
Commissioner, Greater London**

In a similar vein, one young person highlighted the important balance between independence and support within Temporary Living Arrangements:

*"It's important to have somewhere where you can practise levels of independence but then you still have that support on hand if needed."*

---

**Clara, 17, South London**

In contrast to those who felt supported to build skills for independent living, others felt trapped due to poor skills and few opportunities to develop them. One young woman reflected on how her struggles to manage her money, while temporarily staying with her auntie, had a lasting impact on her ability to progress to suitable accommodation:

*"But it was just mainly like I didn't handle my finances very well when I was there at all. And I think that impacted me in the long run because, now, I'm still literally in the same debt, and it's...Yeah, I think it would take me longer to move on from here now because of that."*

---

**Kirsty, 20, North London**

The lived experiences of the young people we spoke to, as well as the insights of the homelessness professionals, suggest that the development of independent living skills are a key factor in young people's journeys towards more suitable accommodation. As such, the suitability of accommodation should in part be judged on its ability to support young people to develop skills related to, for example, budgeting, cooking and self-care.



## Stability and a clear pathway out of homelessness



### Does the living environment put the young person in the right frame of mind to successfully move on?

**'SO WE ARE VULNERABLE REGARDLESS OF WHERE WE ARE, THAT'S WHY I FEEL LIKE IT'S IMPORTANT THAT WE HAVE A STABLE ENVIRONMENT TO THINK ABOUT THE NEXT STEP'**

Clara, 17, South London

While temporary living is by its very nature less stable than most young people need it to be, some living arrangements bring a greater sense of stability than others. For example, young people are more likely to feel stable in a service-provided arrangement protected by a short-term tenancy, or in an informal arrangement with a trusted friend or family member, than in night-by-night emergency shelter or when staying with people they don't know. Existing research has shown that a sense of stability is of critical importance in enabling young people to progress away from homelessness and into more suitable accommodation <sup>14, 12, 24</sup>.

In line with the wider literature, the young people we spoke to frequently articulated how a sense of stability within a Temporary Living Environment had enabled them to start taking steps towards stable housing options. One young woman reflected on her time in a large, mixed-needs hostel and explained how being happy in the environment had helped her on her journey out of homelessness:

*"I felt quite settled and happy at one point. Yeah, that helped. So I was talking to staff about it, and what not, saying I would like to move out."*

Amelia, 20, North West

The importance of stability in enabling move-on was also highlighted by others:

*"Yeah, his dad used to let me go to work with him a couple of days a week, get a little money there. Do you know what I mean? So, it was pretty stable. I knew what I was doing."*

Jake, 23, North London

*"So at the house, that was good, there was a routine, it was stable, and even their mum used to tell me like, 'you could stay longer'... She even helps me like go online, search for like stuff, other places."*

Tanisha, 23, North London

In addition to a sense of stability, many of the young people also described how having a clear pathway out of homelessness was important. They appreciated quick action from those in support roles and support which had clear direction:

*"Temporary accommodation should be stable, where someone can help you sort out any problems you have. So somewhere like you can go to but you need to know you've also got somewhere where you can leave"*

Oscar, 20, North East



*"As soon as I was there, my support worker was just saying that he'd get me a profile set up on Property Shop I think it is, and then I can start getting on places and rather than being shoved to the bottom of the list."*

---

Dylan, 24, North West

In contrast to the positive accounts we heard, many of the young people explained how the ongoing instability of their situations had limited their ability to focus on long-term goals and progression. Instead, they tended to concentrate on the day-to-day reality of homelessness and the negative emotions this brings:

*"I was worrying about the wrong things. It was distracting me. I didn't focus on the things that mattered, I was too busy being scared all the time."*

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Kirsty, 20, North London

While instability can be a direct consequence of Temporary Living Arrangements, such as in night-by-night accommodation – in some cases it can be an indirect consequence. For example, one young person described how his experience in a mixed-needs emergency shelter had exacerbated his substance dependency issues. His use of substances led to feelings of instability that made focusing on improving his situation difficult:

*"I didn't really bother about the future. It was just about the next fix, the next thing. I wasn't really bothered about trying to find somewhere... I was mad."*

---

Ben, 24, North West

It may be assumed that pathways out of homelessness would be clear within service-provided accommodation, however, we found several examples to the contrary. Several of the young people we spoke to

had felt very confused about their next steps while in service-provided arrangements. One young man who had found moving on from supported accommodation difficult outlined the way in which he would ensure young people were aware of how they could move onto stable accommodation:

*"It's communication. I'm one of those people that needs to know what's going on. If I was one of these people I would come in the door and I'd be saying in these six months we're going to build you up, get your ID sorted, make sure you get a job, you know how to manage your money and how to cook."*

---

Jake, 23, North London

The young man's perspective was echoed by one of the homelessness professionals who reiterated the importance of clear timeframes. She felt that managing young people's expectations is also fundamental if they are to feel secure.

*"For some young people it's not a straightforward situation, and it can be quite complex. And I think it's just about being really realistic with them about timeframes and you know, what we can do, what we can't do."*

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Depaul Prevention Services Manager, North West

Our findings suggest that young people in some Temporary Living Environments can feel unstable. These feelings of instability can be brought about by a lack of clarity regarding move-on, uncertainty around length of stay, or exposure to risk factors, such as substances or abusive relationships. Young people who feel unstable within Temporary Living Arrangements can be more susceptible to potential harm as a result of the negative impact on their mental health, and may be less likely to move on positively.



## 6

**Sufficient practical provisions within accommodation****Does the young person have access to the technology they need to move on successfully?**

To make progress towards more suitable housing, it is important that young people in Temporary Living Arrangements are able to stay connected with the outside world. Specifically, they need access to the internet, a phone, and other practical support so that they can maintain positive social connections, research move-on options and access professional support.

The experiences of the young people we interviewed suggests that having access to such provisions increases the likelihood of moving on from both service-provided and informal Temporary Living Arrangements. For example, two young women specifically articulated how the practical support offered within their informal Temporary Living Environment had helped them identify pathways to alternative accommodation:

**'SHE OBVIOUSLY HAD INTERNET IN HER HOUSE... IF I NEEDED TO BORROW THAT OR HER HOUSE PHONE, IT WAS ALWAYS THERE TO HELP ME'**

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Chloe, 19, North East

*"She let me use her phone for the internet or when I needed to call people and that was definitely important."*

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Tracey, 20, North West







A homelessness professional emphasised how simple means of connectivity, such as internet or a phone, can be difficult for young people with housing needs to access. She felt that young people who have access to the internet, for example, were in a better position than those who do not.

*"Young people don't have huge amounts of money often in that situation and actually if you've got someone who's got access to the internet and they can look up where to go to get help, I think they have just got more scope to get the support they need."*

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**Depaul Prevention Services Manager, North West**

Some of the young people we spoke to reflected on positive experiences of practical provisions within service-provided accommodation. For example, one young man explained how being supported to get a mobile phone was going to help him to secure employment:

*"They're going to give me a grant towards a phone, so obviously people can get in touch with me and I can start applying for jobs."*

---

**Ben, 24, North West**

However, there were several examples of accommodation where the absence of computers, reliable Wi-Fi or telephone access had acted as a barrier to move-on for young people. Many of the young people who we spoke to reflected on how the lack of resources within service-provided accommodation had made their journeys to more suitable accommodation more difficult:

*"I didn't have very good facilities as in no Wi-Fi or anything, because I mean that was how I was functioning like, from the hostel I'd have to walk into the city centre and go to the pub to get Wi-Fi ... I think that was really the only hindrance you know, lack of resources."*

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**Dylan, 24, North West**

*"Because it's a hostel, you can't really rely on certain things all the time. Sometimes the internet goes down or just certain things."*

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**Sarah, 18, South London**

*"If the building had Wi-Fi it would be a bonus Sometimes when I haven't been able to get onto my Universal Credit account and I've had no credit or internet, then I've missed an appointment and I get sanctioned."*

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**Joseph, 21, North West**

The lived experiences of the young interviewees, as well as the homelessness professional's insights, highlight the important role practical provisions, such as access to the internet, can play in enabling young people to engage with their wider support systems and take proactive steps in their journey out of homelessness. The absence of quality provisions can prevent young people from progressing out of both informal and service-provided accommodation. As such, young people's access to practical provisions should be considered within any assessment of Temporary Living Arrangements.





# Diagnostic Assessment Tools

**In this report we have identified a number of variables that affect:**

- a. the likelihood a young person will experience harm while in a Temporary Living Arrangement; and
- b. the likelihood a young person will receive the support they need to make steps away from homelessness while in a Temporary Living Arrangement.

These variables provide an evidence-based framework with which to assess the realities of temporary living for young people. Using this framework we have developed three assessment tools that enable a more nuanced approach to understanding Temporary Living Environments and their potential effect on young people staying in them. We hope that sector-wide use of these tools will help to mitigate against the negative effects of unhelpful assumptions regarding the suitability of 'types' of accommodation. This will lead to fewer young people being placed, or spending prolonged periods of time, in living arrangements that put them at risk and/or do little or nothing to help them on their journeys to stability.



## Tool 1: Temporary Living Arrangement Assessment for Homelessness Services

Our first assessment tool enables homelessness services, including local authorities and Third Sector support services, to assess the suitability of where young people are staying at the time they present as needing support or at the point of referral. This will allow services to more effectively prioritise cases so that young people staying in unsuitable environments or those who are most at risk of harm can be supported first. Furthermore, by using the tool to assess the accommodation young people move into after receiving support, practitioners will gain a better understanding of whether they are effectively helping young people out of homelessness.

### Key aims:

- › To provide frontline homelessness professionals with a standard approach to assessing the nature of each young person's Temporary Living Arrangement before making support-related decisions. This will avoid reliance on subjective assumptions based on accommodation type, or ambiguous terms such as 'sofa surfing'.
- › To protect young people who have been shown to be at heightened risk during housing instability by ensuring that their personal characteristics are taken into account in a standardised way when individual temporary living circumstances are assessed.
- › To enable more effective assessment of move-on accommodation and ensure a better understanding of the ways in which services are helping young people to progress away from homelessness.



## Tool 2: Young Person's Self Assessment

Our second tool enables young people to assess their own living arrangements, and access important information about housing options so that they can make informed choices about how best to avoid harm and progress towards stable housing. The tool will also provide young people with a standard way to communicate with homelessness professionals about their current circumstances, and increase the likelihood they will receive support appropriate to their needs.

### Key aims:

- › To help young people avoid Temporary Living Arrangements that could put them at risk or prolong their experience of homelessness.
- › To increase young people's understanding of the support options available to them while out of temporary accommodation.
- › To empower young people to have a clear understanding of the realities of their own living environment, and confidently approach homelessness support services.
- › To enable young people to communicate with homelessness professionals about the issues they are facing without the need for intrusive questions relating to what could be abusive situations.

## Tool 3: Service Provider Self-Assessment

Our third tool enables homelessness services to assess the accommodation they provide for young people against the variables discussed in this report. This will encourage improvements to services which protect vulnerable young people from harm and ensure they are empowered to take the next steps out of homelessness.

### Key aims:

- › To enable accommodation providers to make evidence-based decisions on how to improve their services for young people, paying particular attention to how services meet the needs of particularly vulnerable sub-groups.
- › To raise the standards of service-provided accommodation for young people experiencing housing instability.

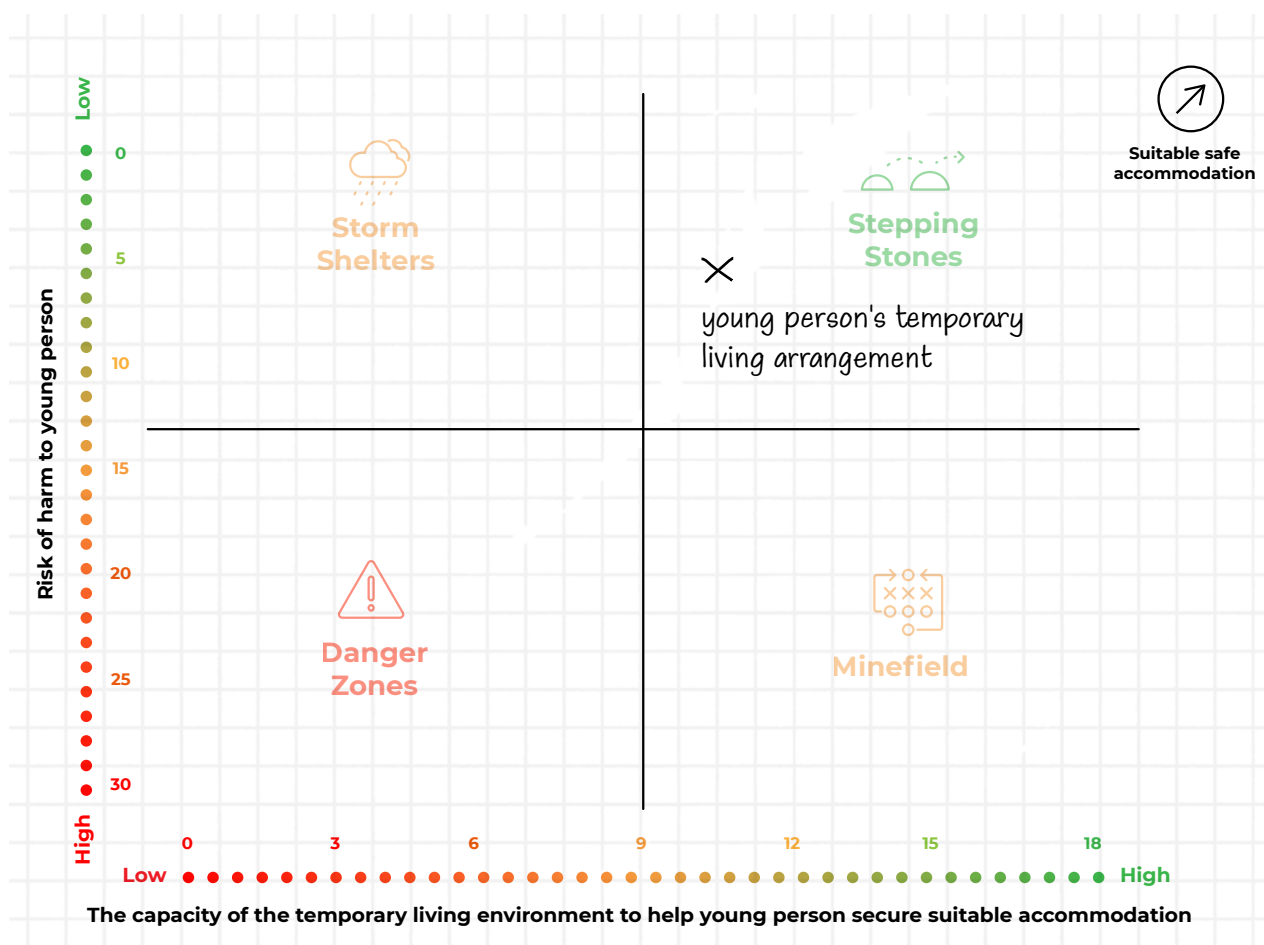


## Tool format

Tools 1 and 2 are diagnostic assessment tools, which take the form of point-valued questionnaires. These questionnaires generate scores that correspond to the two axes of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones assessment model:

- › The level of risk that the environment a young person is staying in will lead to them experiencing harm (the Y axis on Figure 5).
- › The capacity of the Temporary Living Environment to help a young person out of temporary living and into stable accommodation (the X axis on Figure 5)

Figure 5: The Danger Zones & Stepping Stones Assessment Model



These two scores enable a Temporary Living Arrangement to be plotted on the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones matrix and categorised as either a Danger Zone, Stepping Stone, Minefield or Storm Shelter.

This categorisation, and the scores themselves, provide services (Tool 1) and young people (Tool 2) with critical risk and support-related information. This, we hope, will improve decision-making and lead to fewer young people being housed in inappropriate living environments for prolonged periods.

The level of risk posed by a Temporary Living Environment is specific to each individual young person, meaning that an individual's personal characteristics will affect the likelihood of harm. The accommodation might be high risk for some young people, but low risk for others. This is also true in relation to the propensity of a Temporary Living Environment to be supportive. Some young people may feel empowered by the environment and others might feel trapped. As such, it is not possible to produce a standard score for an accommodation service housing multiple young people. Due to this, rather than using points-based scales, the tool for services to evaluate their own provisions (Tool 3) takes the form of an open-ended questionnaire that encourages consideration of the variables identified in this report.

## Evaluation and wider dissemination

The draft tools included in this report are ready for testing within Depaul UK's services. This testing is scheduled to occur between November 2020 and May 2021. Following this period, the tools will be amended based on Depaul UK's learnings, before being made available to the wider homelessness sector. In time we also hope that the tools can be developed into web-based platforms so they can be used digitally by young people and practitioners alike.

# Conclusions

The Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research has drawn on lived experiences to gain insight into the places young people stay during periods of housing instability. In line with existing evidence, we have found that when housed in unsuitable conditions young people can experience significant harm and/or become trapped in homelessness. Our aim has been to improve the way in which Temporary Living Arrangements are assessed so that dangerous and/or unsupportive arrangements can be identified more easily and the youth homelessness sector is better equipped to protect and support young people who face homelessness.

The desire to protect young people from harm is not new. However, our research suggests that as a sector we have been attempting to understand experiences using terms and categories that are ambiguous and unreliable. In Phase One of the research series we found that terms such as 'sofa surfing' or 'living with friends' are used to denote a huge variety of experiences, both positive and negative. Using such terms to make judgments about young people's safety in Temporary Living Arrangements can result in them being housed in, or not being removed from, environments that could be harmful.

Our findings suggest that assumptions in relation to the safety or supportiveness of living arrangements based on accommodation 'type' are also unreliable. While there was some indication that certain living arrangements (e.g. living with strangers) may pose a greater risk than others (e.g. supported accommodation), the overarching theme of our findings was one of diversity and subjectivity, with 'good' and 'bad' arrangements existing within all categories.

Our research suggests that levels of risk young people are exposed to can vary dramatically. The differing level of risk is not only shaped by factors within the immediate living environment but can also be driven by external factors. Additionally, key characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation shape the nature of the risk a young person may face.

To facilitate a more nuanced understanding of young people's subjective circumstances, we have developed the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model. This encourages assessments of Temporary Living Arrangements that consider: a) the likelihood young people will be harmed while in the accommodation, and b) the accommodation's propensity to support young people out of homelessness.

In this third and final phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research, we have drawn on the experiences and opinions of young people and housing professionals to identify a series of factors that we believe should be considered when assessing whether a young person is at risk of harm within a Temporary Living Arrangement. Additionally, a series of factors that affect how supportive a Temporary Living Arrangement is for a young person has also been identified. Importantly, all the factors identified in this report transcend accommodation type, meaning they are relevant to all living arrangements, both 'informal' and service-provided.

Taken together, the factors we have identified provide a framework for using the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones model to assess Temporary Living Arrangements. To further facilitate this, we have developed three diagnostic tools for use by the youth homelessness sector.

We hope that our research, and the practical tools that have derived from it, will tangibly improve understanding of young people's circumstances, leading to better decision-making and improvements to service-provided accommodation.



# Recommendations

As a sector we can attempt to educate the public about the needs of young people experiencing homelessness. Beyond this, however, we have no control over the quality of informal Temporary Living Arrangements. Our priorities should therefore focus on using the evidence provided in this report to:

- a. improve the accommodation we can control (e.g. supported accommodation) so there are more safe places for young people to be
- b. identify young people who are staying in unsafe places so we can be more effective in moving them away from harm and towards arrangements that facilitate their journey to stability
3. Promote, and support young people to use, the Young Person's Self Assessment (Tool 2). This will help young people gain a clearer understanding of the realities of the Temporary Living Environments they find themselves in and to communicate this to service providers.

## Depaul UK recommends that:

### Providers of accommodation and non-accommodation services for young people who are homeless use the diagnostic tools that have been developed.

Once finalised after internal testing, the tools we have developed will be released to the sector. They will help accommodation providers to improve the safety of their housing and ensure that sufficient support is available. They will also help non-accommodation services to identify young people who are at particularly high risk of harm or not receiving the support that they need to escape homelessness.

### Specifically, providers should:

1. Ensure that young people's Temporary Living Arrangements are assessed using the Temporary Living Arrangement Assessment for Homelessness Services (Tool 1). This will challenge assumptive practice and help providers make prioritisation decisions based on a more nuanced understanding of individual circumstances.
2. Assess and improve their own accommodation offerings by utilising the Service Provider Self-Assessment (Tool 3). This tool will enable services to identify possible weaknesses within service-provided accommodation which may place a young person at heightened risk

or prevent a young person from taking steps towards suitable accommodation options.

## In addition, service providers should:

4. Ensure that all young people in their services are taught about housing options and related issues so they are equipped to take steps towards more suitable accommodation when they are ready.
5. Actively explore how young people's identities and characteristics may shape their experiences of their services. Safeguarding young people from ethnic minority backgrounds, young women, those from the LGBTQ+ community, care leavers, and young people with disabilities and/or learning difficulties is of paramount importance.

## Recommendations to Government

Government also has a role in ensuring that sufficient safe, supportive service based accommodation for young people is available, particularly since much of it is publicly funded. The recent publication of the Government's National Statement of Expectations in Supported Housing, as well as a consultation on introducing regulatory standards in accommodation for looked after children and care leavers, are encouraging steps.

The Government, however, needs to go further to meet its commitment to 'breaking the cycle of homelessness'. Our Danger



Zones research reports have shown that there are significant numbers of young people staying in informal, non-service provided accommodation. While we know these informal arrangements often expose young people to harm and trap them in homelessness, their informal nature means they fall outside of any attempts to introduce regulation or oversight.

Most of the 712 people we surveyed for our second report had stayed with strangers, and most of these had been harmed while doing so. Twelve per cent had engaged in sexual activity for a place to stay, and over a quarter had slept rough. We know that young people are sleeping rough and in other dangerous places right now, during a pandemic. The evidence points to a significant shortage of service provided accommodation for young people who are homeless:

1. The Ministry for Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) should urgently commit to initiate and lead work with homelessness charities, local authorities and elected mayors to assess the need for youth specific homelessness accommodation services and the extent to which this need is being met.

Our Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research shows that homelessness is inherently risky. While we need to make sure young people without a home have somewhere safe to sleep, Depaul believes that homelessness, including youth homelessness, can and should be ended. To do this we need to prevent people becoming homeless in the first place, Crisis research has found that the median age when people first became homeless is 22. [<https://www.crisis.org.uk/ending-homelessness/homelessness-knowledge-hub/types-of-homelessness/nations-apart-experiences-of-single-homeless-people-across-great-britain-2014/>] Doing more to prevent youth homelessness would make significant progress towards making sure no-one is left without a home, as well as to meeting the government's commitment to ending rough sleeping:

2. The Prime Minister should act on his commitment to launch a review into the causes of rough sleeping. This should include a specific focus on young people and make recommendations that would reduce other forms of homelessness, as well as rough sleeping.
3. MHCLG should fund and evaluate a national youth homelessness prevention programme, including preventative family mediation services and homelessness intervention in schools and colleges.

### **Suggestions for further research:**

The lived experiences of our interviewees suggest that Temporary Living Arrangements play a critical role in shaping young people's pathways out of homelessness. However, a number of structural issues were also identified that prevent young people from moving on successfully – for example, insufficient benefit entitlement or a lack of affordable housing. While we must strive to ensure that the Temporary Living Environments young people stay in are 'Stepping Stones' to independent accommodation, without progressive structural change achieving positive move-on outcomes will remain difficult.

Depaul UK suggests that in to effectively support young people out of homelessness further research into the structural issues that prevent young people's progression is needed. In particular, there should be further exploration into young people's experience of means-tested benefit entitlements, as well as access to affordable housing.

# Appendices

The appendices of this report can be found at: <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/policies/>

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