

# Getting It Right For Young People



**St  
Basils**  
*Works with young people*

**NYRG**  
*National Youth Reference Group*

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SET UP AND SUPPORTED BY THE DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

# National Youth Reference Group NYRG

National Youth Reference Group is made up of over 50 young people aged 16-25 throughout the 9 regions of England. Young people have shared their personal experiences of being homeless, accommodated and supported.

What works?

What can be improved?

NYRG hope by doing so they can influence change in service delivery to young people around the Country.

**“Felt like I didn’t belong to anyone”**

ALL QUOTES HAVE COME DIRECT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS  
THE PHOTOS/QUOTES USED THROUGHOUT THIS PUBLICATION ARE NOT SPECIFIC TO THE CONTENT

## Crisis Point

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### The challenges young people faced

#### *Where to go for help*

It took a long time to work out where to go for help and I'm running out of options.

#### *Not sure what to expect*

I probably have no idea what to expect from your service.

#### *Dealing with my feelings*

I might be upset, afraid, angry and feeling bad about myself – which will make it harder to cope if 'the system' is hard to navigate.

#### *Will I be safe?*

There is uncertainty about whether I will have anywhere safe to stay which is hard to handle.

#### *My own fears of Emergency accommodation*

As it might be or seem more scary than sleeping out – so I may not go there, or might not stick it for long. That doesn't mean I don't need help!

## “Had such an impact on my life and not in a good way”

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## Crisis Point

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### How you as professionals can make a difference to young peoples' experience

#### *Prevention works!*

Like raising awareness in schools on Youth Homelessness. Peer mentoring works successfully around the country.

#### *Little things make a big difference*

A smile, a cuppa, feeling you have time for me and you care about the crisis that I'm in.

#### *Initial contact has a massive impact*

Understand that I might be relying on you alone and what you do might affect my life for a long time to come.

#### *Listen, explain and give us choices*

I need you to listen well, explain my options, rights and responsibilities clearly, and help me get the support I need, including help in dealing with the problems at home.

#### *Consider the relationships we make*

If I have to be referred to someone else for help please don't cut me adrift or make me start all over again.

#### *Eliminate the unknown*

If I can't stay with someone I know and need emergency accommodation do your best to make sure it'll be safe, to tell me what to expect, and to make sure I know how to get help if I need it.

## Assessments

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### The challenges young people faced

Assessments can be long, repetitive and seem disjointed, as well as being passed around different people.

#### *Uncertainty takes its toll*

Meanwhile the uncertainty takes its toll, especially if I don't feel safe where I'm staying or I'm not sure how long I can stay there.

#### *I need help as well as assessment*

Like money to live on, with working things out with my family, keeping going with school or college, perhaps immediate health needs.

#### *It's hard to make big decisions about your life*

I might be expected to make big decisions, like whether to go into care, and I'm probably not in the best frame of mind for big decisions.

**“Not equipped to deal with  
the situation I was in”**

ALL QUOTES HAVE COME DIRECT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

## Assessments

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### How you as professionals can make a difference to young peoples' experience

#### *Get back to Basics*

More of the same smiles, cuppas and a supportive approach!

#### *Design assessments so I'm not passed around*

If I am, help me deal with it – like letting the next person know to expect me and what my issues are and making sure I can get there.

#### *Arrange for someone to support me during the whole process*

Like a Connexions worker or other support workers. It helps to have one worker not several.

#### *Check I'm okay*

Check out where I'm staying and help me deal with problems.

#### *Provide proper information about what my options are*

I need someone knowledgeable and independent to talk to, and time to decide when I have to make an important decision.



## Places to stay

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### The challenges young people faced

#### *If I'm staying with people I know*

I feel I am imposing - like my friend's mum, I can tell when I've overstayed my welcome.

#### *Its daunting going to stay in an unknown place*

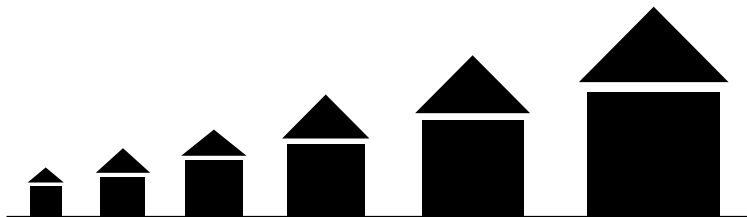
Like a hostel or foster home, and I might have heard frightening stories about what some places are like and who lives there.

#### *Living away from home will be very different*

With new people, dangers and risks as well as maybe more freedom

#### *If I'm afraid or unhappy*

This can affect my personality - where I'm staying I might behave in a way that seems bad or disruptive and end up making things worse for myself.



**“I felt my life was not in my control anymore - I didn't ask to be homeless”**

ALL QUOTES HAVE COME DIRECT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

## Places to stay

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### How you as professionals can make a difference to young peoples' experience

#### *The Basics are really important*

If you help me to stay with family or friends, even temporarily, help me make sure its safe and I'm welcome, don't leave me there without information for me and the people I'm staying with about what will happen next.

#### *Give me the right information and choices about placements*

Take care over what sort of place you set up for me, give me as much information and choice as you can and let me know where to get help if things start to go wrong.

#### *I also need to know where to go If it doesn't work out*

Make sure I'll have support to keep my life on track, including coping with a new living environment and new people, practical things like education and training, and emotional things like how I feel and dealing with family issues.

#### *Make sure I'll have support to keep my life on track*

Respond to bad behavior in accommodation firmly, but try to understand the underlying reasons and help resolve them.



# 3

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# SUPER TOP TIPS

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To Professionals

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**Care** about me, my welfare and my safety throughout the whole process

If you are responsible for **supporting** me, be friendly, approachable and knowledgeable

**Train** me with the right skills so I can make the right decisions and choices in my life

## CASE STUDY 1: Age 17

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### *How did you become homeless?*

I was taken from my mother via Social Services. I was placed in Foster Care, and for a time I was in a children's home. When I left care I spent some time sofa surfing and then I moved in with my boyfriend, I then found a place with an organisation that works with young people with housing and support.

### *What were your feelings about being accommodated?*

Happy, independent, I had my own space, and it felt like a home.

### *What support did you get / need?*

I didn't really feel like I needed any emotional support so I was OK. What I needed were simple things, like feeling safe.

### *How has that impacted on you?*

It has given me direction, I have done some really interesting work for a youth organisation as a mentor under the future jobs fund programme and I have learnt a lot from that. I now work as a Fundraiser for another charity.



## CASE STUDY 2: Age 20

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### *How did you become homeless?*

Family Breakdown.

I had a very volatile and controlling Father, I was expected to marry against my will. I conformed for as long as I could but would often run away to live with my grandmother, I always found myself back at home, my mother would try to make things ok. My father took my family and me to Saudi Arabia and it was here that I found out that I was being prepared for a marriage against my will. I slept rough for a while, and was then referred to a Domestic Violence Refuge for women... With very limited support and feeling alone and confused someone suggested that I refer myself to a Foyer, I had heard lots of very negative things about the Foyer's but knew that the refuge was not an ideal place for me to be, as it was only 1 hour away from my violent father.

### *What were your feelings about being accommodated?*

Confused, a burden, disillusioned and I was a danger to myself.

### *What Support did you get / need?*

I received very little support, but what I needed was someone to listen to me and really understand me and my feelings.

### *How has that impacted on you?*

I do not have any regrets about leaving the family home, however I feel isolated from the family and disconnected from society, but I have learnt that I want to transfer similar help to others, I feel more centred now.

## CASE STUDY 3: Age 17

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### *How did you become homeless?*

I was living with a partner, we separated as the relationship broke down and he asked me to leave. I remember very clearly to this day sleeping at a cash point, it had a doorway that closed, that night I probably slept for 2 hours, I felt that I could have been attacked that night, stabbed, raped, beaten up, I was very scared.

I visited the Homeless Team who told me that as I was 17, I was not classed as emergency homeless I was in touch with Connexions and my PA made a referral to Nightstop. It was a bit weird staying with strangers and at one point I stayed with a nightstop host who lived in the middle of nowhere, but I made the best of a bad situation and made do, I had had some contact with a youth homelessness organisation and went in to see them and they were happy to offer me a place.

### *What were your feelings about being accommodated?*

I was confused, disoriented, empty, lost, but I did feel a sense of safety, The housing organisation saved my life, I do believe that I would have attempted suicide if not for their help.

### *What Support did you get / need?*

The staff offered me counselling which really helped me, The Youth Organisation had an open door policy where you could talk to staff and ask for support, they were amazing. What I needed was just someone to listen to me when I was feeling in distress.

### *How has that impacted on you?*

It has made me who I am today, I now work as a voluntary Youth Worker and I represent NYRG, I believe that I will endeavour to scrutinise policy and make a difference to other young people who may be presented with similar homeless issues like my own.

## CASE STUDY 4: Age 18

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### *How did you become homeless?*

My Father was planning to move abroad, there was no room at his house for me whilst he was making his plans, so I was asked to leave, with no consideration for my welfare and me.

In August 2008, after college, my father relocated abroad, I was forced to leave the family home, and from there I presented myself to the local neighbourhood office with a negative outcome. I lodged with friends until October. I went to 3 different locations around England for 2 weeks, I pretended it was a holiday and did not expect to drift until November, I then went to yet another town where I worked in a pub until 2009, in February I was forced to leave again and was once again sofa surfing, back to my home town my friends mom passed my details to the Youth Homeless Organisation, I then had a two week wait for accommodation and I was placed in accommodation.

### *What were your feelings about being accommodated?*

Happiness, relief, but I felt humiliated because I was living in a homeless hostel.

### *What Support did you get – What did you need?*

The support I got met my fundamental needs, a warm, dry and had a safe place to stay with food and clean clothes. I needed someone to listen to me when I needed to talk and offload, I needed to feel secure, I needed a home and I needed to feel a sense of belonging.

### *How has that impacted on you?*

I have emotional issues, I have self-harmed, I still do but it is better to manage now, but I am desperately unhappy, as I do not know what the future holds for me. I have feelings about suicide often.

## CASE STUDY 5: Age 19

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### *How did you become homeless?*

I was in a co-dependant relationship and I had to leave for my own safety, I slept rough for 3 weeks, I was in the early stages of my pregnancy and because I was of no fixed abode, I had received a warrant and a court summons for non payment of a TV licence, I was then arrested and placed on remand for 1 month. I was then released into a bail hostel, from there I was referred to a Mother and Baby Agency. My daughter is nearly 1 years of age and I am now in my own property.

### *What where your feelings about being accommodated?*

Helpless, alone, small and insignificant, dis-enabled.

### *What Support did you get / need?*

Did not get much emotional support from staff, at least when I was in prison they had listener's, that was all I needed, someone to listen to me, I felt so alone as I do not have family and at that time no friends to talk to about my emotions. I felt very lost with a baby on the way.

### *How has that impacted on you?*

I adopted a get up and go attitude, I did everything for myself, and it has to taught me to be more responsible and more self-reliant.

**“I was worried that all my education was going to be disrupted”**

ALL QUOTES HAVE COME DIRECT FROM YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS

## Young people were asked how their experience could have been better...

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It is really important for staff to listen more to young people. Services to provide Peer Mentors, that would really work, services need to be flexible and not 9-5.

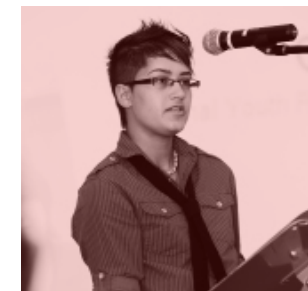
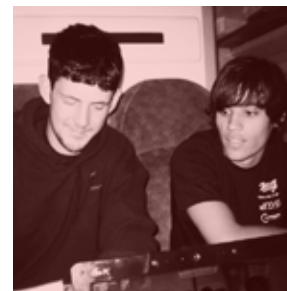
Support services significant to higher support needs working with Young People just like me: Projects to have more friendly staff, staff that are warm and open.

My experience was ideal and it has made me the person that I am today.

The waiting time for emergency accommodation should not be isolated to first come first serve.

In an ideal world I would like that my first intervention had been more positive, it would have given me a more positive measure of good and bad.

To benefit from more suitable signposting services, e.g. emergency accommodation, as opposed to being informed that you are a young adult who can now fend for one's self, not really what you want to hear when you have no where to live or even sleep for the night.



## Acknowledgements

Design by We Are SMILE Ltd.

Printed by Tuckey Print, Birmingham

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**“Youth homelessness is  
just a hurdle - with the right  
support you can still reach  
your goals and aspirations”**

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