

## **Children, Families and Young People Briefing**

### **Children and Families**

In recent years, consistently around 27% of households making a homeless application include children, with 10,129 (27.8%) making applications in 2018-19. Three quarters (76%) are single parent households (7,753 households), primarily headed by women: female single parents make up 17% of all homeless applicants<sup>1</sup>. Female single parents are twice as likely to be homeless as a result of a violent or abusive dispute than homeless applicants as a whole (27% compared to 13%)<sup>2</sup>.

In 2018-19, 14,043 children were in households assessed as homeless<sup>3</sup>. Households with children are more likely to become homeless from the private rented sector (PRS), making up 48% of applicants from the PRS in 2018/19. Households with children are more likely to identify unmet need for support from housing, social work or health services as a factor in their homelessness, but they are less likely to have support needs such as mental health, substance issues or lack of independent living skills. Households with children spend longer in temporary accommodation, on average 219 days compared to 166 days for households without children<sup>4</sup>.

### **Impact of homelessness on children**

While becoming homeless is a difficult enough experience for adults, there are specific concerns for children<sup>5</sup>. The recent 'Health Needs Assessment of children experiencing homelessness in Lanarkshire', used mixed methods including data linkage to explore the needs of children in Lanarkshire experiencing homelessness<sup>6</sup>. It found:

- Children in the homeless (HL1) cohort had twice the rate of referral to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service than the control cohort, but were also less likely to attend the appointment.
- At the 27-30 month review conducted by health visitors, the HL1 cohort had significantly higher rates of concern including speech/ language/ communication and emotional/behavioural than the control cohort.
- The HL1 group were more likely to present or contact emergency or out of hours services due to respiratory issues or conditions.
- Many children experiencing homelessness miss periods of school due to frequent moves or the requirement to travel long distances if temporary accommodation is in a different area from the school<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Homelessness in Scotland: Annual Publication 2018-19

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Homelessness in Scotland: 2018 to 2019 – equalities breakdown

<sup>3</sup> This figure includes 16 -18 year olds. The figure without this age bracket is 13,459. Scottish Government (2019) Adults and children assessed as homeless 2014/15 to 2018/19

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Homelessness in Scotland: 2018 to 2019 – equalities breakdown

<sup>5</sup> Scottish Government (2011) Meeting the Best Interests of Children Facing Homelessness

<sup>6</sup> Campbell, R. (2019) Health Needs Assessment of children experiencing homelessness in Lanarkshire, Online: NHS Lanarkshire

<sup>7</sup> Campbell (2019)

Another issue of concern is the social and emotional impact of homelessness on children. Maintaining contact with supportive family and friends can be more difficult for children than for adults if they have to move to a different area, partially because they are practically reliant on adults for transport. A small-scale study by Shelter Scotland found that the factors determining children's experiences of homelessness are as much based on children's proximity to good social relationships, school and activities as living in housing of a decent standard and size. The children interviewed were concerned about having to deal with a lack of a permanent home and the related issues of moving around, particularly when it did not lead to an improved situation from children's perspectives<sup>8</sup>. When children describe their experiences of homelessness, the dominant themes are loss, anxiety and fear. Thus, action to prevent homelessness occurring in the first place can have a particularly positive benefit for families with children<sup>9</sup>.

Scottish Government issued statutory guidance in 2011 on 'Meeting the Best Interests of Children Facing Homelessness'. This sets out an expectation that the responsibility for meeting the best interests of children facing homelessness does not rest solely with the local authority section dealing directly with homelessness: all relevant departments and sections within the council should be engaged and involved<sup>10</sup>. It also highlights that the children's perspective should be listened to and considered when responding to a family with children facing homelessness. Although special provision and consideration should be given for the children in a family, the guidance points out that ultimately the best interests of children are met through the most effective management of the circumstances<sup>11</sup>. That is to say, effective action taken to prevent homelessness for the whole family will be best for the children involved.

## **Poverty**

Empirical evidence indicates consistently and compellingly that experience of poverty is a common denominator shared by the vast majority of homeless people in the UK and elsewhere, with homelessness continuing to disproportionately affect the most economically disadvantaged members of society<sup>12</sup>. Poverty can contribute to high stress and family breakdown within the home<sup>13</sup>. This is acknowledged in the 2009 Homelessness Prevention Guidance, which points local authorities to offer practical support to families 'where poverty creates additional strain on relationships that can cause housing crisis', for example in the form of Discretionary Housing Payments or furniture packs<sup>14</sup>.

As well as poverty being an immediate driver of homelessness for families with children, poverty also has a role to play in youth homelessness. For an international review of evidence on youth homelessness, Dr. Beth Watts articulated, 'Any prevention strategy or plan must recognise that

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<sup>8</sup> Shelter Scotland (2009) Acting in the best interests of homeless children - children and young people's views on where they live

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government (2011)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, S. and Watts, B. (2014) Homelessness and Poverty: Reviewing the links, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2017) UK Poverty 2017, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

<sup>14</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2009) Prevention of Homelessness Guidance

the roots of youth homelessness are child poverty<sup>15</sup>. Young people who are from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds face higher risks of homelessness<sup>16</sup>, including because of financial pressures in the home resulting in a young person being asked to leave<sup>17</sup>. There is also a knock-on impact of childhood poverty for future risk of homelessness as an adult<sup>18</sup>.

One factor that has been identified as impacting on child poverty is the impact of the welfare changes in recent years<sup>19</sup>. An overall freeze to benefits, the roll out of Universal Credit and shortfalls in Local Housing Allowance (LHA) have major impacts. A small family in a two bed property can face LHA shortfalls on £100 a month<sup>20</sup>. The lowering of the Benefit Cap threshold in 2016 almost trebled the number of claimant households in Scotland affected to more than 3,000, two-thirds of whom are lone parent households. One survey found that almost three-quarters of Scottish local authorities felt that welfare reforms have exacerbated homelessness in their area<sup>21</sup>.

### **Getting It Right For Every Child**

The child-centred approach set out in 'Getting it right for every child' (GIRFEC) promotes a shared approach to meeting the needs of all children and young people. The Scottish Government review in 2001 of children's services 'For Scotland's Children' had found that services needed to work better together and often had conflicting objectives - decisions made in one service impacted on other services involved<sup>22</sup>. It found evidence that often families had to keep repeating the same information and had no consistent place to ask for help. GIRFEC responded to these concerns by introducing a 'named person' for every child in Scotland, giving a single point of contact for children, young people and families to ask for advice or support. GIRFEC also directs agencies to look at eight wellbeing indicators<sup>23</sup>, providing a shared framework for people to discuss how a child or young person is doing at a point in time and if there is a need for support. In practice, GIRFEC encourages mechanisms such as multi agency meetings and shared assessments for agencies to work together to promote the wellbeing of children. The Getting It Right For Every Child practice model is legislated through the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014.

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<sup>15</sup> Beth Watts, Senior Research Fellow at Heriot-Watt University. Personal interview, 22nd June, 2018 in Schwan, K., French, D., Gaetz, S., Ward, A., Akerman, J., & Redman, M. (2018) Preventing youth homelessness An international review of evidence, Cardiff: The Wales Centre for Public Policy

<sup>16</sup> Watts, B., Johnsen, S. and Sosenko, F. (2015) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Review for The OVO Foundation, Institute for Social Policy, Housing, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University

<sup>17</sup> Equal Opportunities Committee (2012) Having and Keeping a Home: Steps to prevent homelessness among young people, Edinburgh: Scottish Parliament

<sup>18</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G. and Johnsen, S. (2013) Pathways into multiple exclusion homelessness in seven UK cities, Urban Studies, 50(1), 148-168.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Child Poverty Action Group (2019) Social Security - Where have we been and where are we going?

<sup>20</sup> Alma Economics (2018) Local Housing Allowance: Options for reform. Crisis

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, S., Pawson, H. Bramley, G., Watts, B., Stephens, M. and Blenkinsop, J. (2019) The Homeless Monitor: Scotland 2019, Isphere and The Urban Institute, Heriot Watt University, and City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

<sup>22</sup> Scottish Executive (2001) For Scotland's Children: Better Integrated Children's Services

<sup>23</sup> The eight indicators are: Safe, healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included

The coordinated approach that GIRFEC promotes is important in responding to children at risk of homelessness. As a starting point, GIRFEC expects anyone working with a child to identify and plan action to address the needs and risks faced by the child in a way which looks at the child as a whole and builds solutions with and around children and families<sup>24</sup>. That is to say, the GIRFEC approach would a priori expect wider public bodies to work together to play a role in preventing children becoming homeless. This ethos is echoed in the 'Meeting the Best Interests of the Child' statutory guidance, which specifies:

*local authorities should ensure that joint-working partnerships with other agencies are underpinned by effective working protocols that allow for agreed operational practices to commence at as early a stage as possible once it has been identified that a family with children requires assistance to either prevent or alleviate a homelessness situation<sup>25</sup>.*

'Meeting the Best Interests of Children Facing Homelessness' sets out what a homelessness practitioner's response to questions set out in the GIRFEC practice guidance, which recommends that practitioners should ask themselves these questions:

- What is getting in the way of this child's well-being?
- Do I have all the information I need to help this child?
- What can I do now to help this child?
- What can my agency do to help this child?
- What additional help, if any, may be needed from others?

However, any other professional in contact with a child at risk of homelessness may be the first to notice stability of accommodation as an issue.

A common understanding and acceptance of GIRFEC aims and principles can provide a foundation for partners to build on in defining these details together. However, going beyond the universal GIRFEC approach may be helpful for preventing and responding to homeless children and their families. For example, through the establishment of joint working processes, referral mechanisms and protocols between agencies. However, establishing these can be complex given differing priorities, sets of rules and tight budgets for statutory partners.

### **Role of Health visitors**

For children before they start school, health visitors are the 'Named Person' under the GIRFEC framework, and, as such, are key figures in looking after the wellbeing of children who are at risk of homelessness. For children under 5 years, health visiting offers a universal service which maintains contact through the early years, and should be a mechanism to identify potential issues at their early stages and offer some level of support if required<sup>26</sup>. Through visiting families in their homes, health visitors can gain unique insights about people's lives that others don't, including becoming aware of precarious housing situations and the impact this is having

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<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2009) Prevention of Homelessness Guidance

<sup>25</sup> Scottish Government (2011)

<sup>26</sup> Campbell (2019)

on the family<sup>27</sup>. Recent research for Shelter indicated that for health visitors, especially those working in deprived communities, early identification of potential homelessness is a regular occurrence. Health visitors' public health approach enables them to be at the interface between relevant services, such as housing, environmental health and the voluntary sector<sup>28</sup>. As public service professionals who are often trusted by families that may not engage with other services, health visitors are well placed to refer families for housing advice, offer support and act as advocates on families' behalf.

### **Role of Schools**

As a universal service for children, schools have a crucial role to play in promoting wellbeing. With regards to homelessness this has predominantly been through teachers having pastoral opportunities to identify risk of homelessness, engage with the pupils collectively and individually where there is specific risk and where necessary involve other agencies, and through the inclusion of information about homelessness in the curriculum. Pupils and their families will have a named point of contact in the school, usually the head, depute head or guidance teacher.

The recent Hard Edges Scotland study found that in terms of 'missed opportunities' for preventative interventions in the lives of adults currently experiencing Severe and Multiple Disadvantages, schools and other educational services were a central theme raised by people with lived experience, service providers and national stakeholders<sup>29</sup>. Opportunities may continue to be missed by schools. The recent Lanarkshire health and homelessness study found a gap in support for homeless children once they reach school age. Although systems were described to be in place in North Lanarkshire using a GIRFEC referral to notify the child's named person within a school setting (usually the head teacher) about risk or experience of homelessness, it was not clear what was being done with the notification once received, what the expectations were following the notification and there was currently no follow up to assess the impact of the notification. This process had been in place in South Lanarkshire but had stopped being completed. The study identified that within the school setting there was a lot of willingness but very little resource to be able to support children experiencing homelessness. There was a sense that teachers felt left on their own with very little support from external agencies and with resource cuts, such as the loss of attendance officers and active breaks workers, impacting on support that was previously offered<sup>30</sup>.

One informant for the Equal Opportunities Committee investigation into youth homeless in 2012 emphasised the importance of training teachers so that they could identify and act on some of the homelessness triggers<sup>31</sup>. This has been echoed in recent qualitative research for Shelter Scotland in which a young interviewee felt that school staff could have been more aware of the

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.qni.org.uk/2018/03/12/the-unique-impact-of-health-visitors-on-poor-families/>

<sup>28</sup> Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2004) Homelessness and Health Information Sheet Number 2: Health Visiting Services, London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

<sup>29</sup> Bramley et al. (2019)

<sup>30</sup> Campbell (2019)

<sup>31</sup> Equal Opportunities Committee (2012)

risks and indicators of homelessness, which for the individual concerned started at age 13, as well as for the staff to be trained in how to respond appropriately<sup>32</sup>.

In addition to pastoral care offered by teachers, some schools include education on homelessness within their curriculum, usually within secondary school personal and social education lessons. They can use these to address and undermine stigma around homelessness, making it a topic that is more likely to be broached without shame in the school context. The recent Crisis analysis of Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans (RRTPs) found six of Scotland's 32 local authorities mentioning existing education programmes, and nine others planning to implement them<sup>33</sup>. The Equal Opportunities Committee recommended that local authorities investigate which schools young people who were homeless had come from, whether there was homelessness education available in those schools and finding out what the barriers to it being delivered were<sup>34</sup>. The role of the local authority being essential in directing schools regarding a prevention duty has been highlighted in recent research<sup>35</sup>.

Nevertheless, there is a lack of robust evidence on the impact of generic homelessness education in schools<sup>36</sup>. Given what is known about the causes of youth homelessness and the complex needs of families who experience it, it is unlikely that a school-based workshop alone would prevent homelessness, although it can provide young people with the knowledge needed to access more targeted support<sup>37</sup>. However as discussed below, targeted multiagency approaches based in schools can provide a valuable early intervention approach.

### **Role of social work**

The social work response to children at risk of homelessness is not defined in law. The capacity of a local social work department to provide different levels of help depends upon them balancing the needs of a homeless family with the demands upon them to help others<sup>38</sup>. Under s.22(1)(a) Children (Scotland) Act 1995 local authorities have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are in need in their area. The social work definition of 'in need' is that health and development are at risk.

Under section 25 of the same Act, the local authority has the power to provide accommodation for any child within their area if they consider that to do so would safeguard or promote her/his welfare, but case law in England, setting a precedent for Scottish courts, says that there is no duty on social work departments to provide accommodation for the parents as well as the child<sup>39</sup>. There is only a potential duty towards the children in families experiencing

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<sup>32</sup> Dore, E. (to be published 2020)

<sup>33</sup> Dunn, L. (2020) Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans: A Scottish Overview, Online: Crisis

<sup>34</sup> Equal Opportunities Committee (2012)

<sup>35</sup> Dore, E. (to be published 2020) Working title: Wider public bodies and the prevention duty. Unpublished: Shelter Scotland

<sup>36</sup> Watts et al. (2015)

<sup>37</sup> Centrepoint (2016) Preventing Youth Homelessness: What Works

<sup>38</sup> [How to get a social worker to help me](#)

<sup>39</sup> G v Barnet LBC (2001) CA, LAG June 2001. A v Lambeth (2001) CA LAG December 2001

homelessness, rather than the whole family. As homelessness can have a harmful impact on the health and development of children, in some cases there may be a role for social work.

Demand on social work services is generally very high and acute, focusing on child protection and welfare cases, which are often judged to take precedence over children in homeless households where there is no other vulnerability (for example, neglect or domestic abuse). It is more likely that if social workers are already involved with a family and a risk of homelessness develops, then working with housing and homelessness colleagues would be part of case work responsibilities.

Any person under the age of 18 is technically classified as a child by social work. However, young people that are towards the higher end of this range may be contested as new cases to be taken on by children's and families social work departments due to service pressures. There is also awareness among children's and families social work practitioners of an approaching need to transition away from the service. As a young person can hold a tenancy from the age of 16 there can be ambiguity over where responsibility for this age group lies.

This ambiguity and potential gap in services is addressed by some local authorities by '16 and 17 year old protocols' being in place between the housing and social work teams in some local authorities. This may include delivering a joint social work and homelessness assessment for individuals to determine which team is best placed to provide which elements of support. A protocol is also helpful in establishing at a service level what departments are responsible for, and which budget payment for provision should come from. The law provides for social work giving assistance in kind or, in exceptional circumstances, in cash<sup>40</sup> or accommodation<sup>41</sup> to young people aged 16 and 17 in need of accommodation, who are not care leavers. Financial assistance may be used, for example, to help a young person access accommodation by paying a deposit and rent in advance.

In England, the 2009 "Southwark judgement"<sup>42</sup> led to clarification of local authorities' duties toward the accommodation of homeless 16 and 17 year olds<sup>43</sup>, which made a major difference in the assistance provided to this group of young people. It places the responsibility to accommodate and assist primarily with children's services, including responsibilities to support the young person to transition to independent adult living<sup>44</sup>.

Beyond the issue of 16/17 year olds facing homelessness, the challenge of presented by service thresholds being set at a certain age was raised during the Scottish Government enquiry into youth homelessness in 2012:

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<sup>40</sup> s.22(3)(b) Children (Scotland) Act 1995

<sup>41</sup> s.25(1) Children (Scotland) Act 1995

<sup>42</sup> R (G) v London Borough of Southwark (2009)

<sup>43</sup> MHCLG / DfE (2010, revised 2018) Prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation

<sup>44</sup> Shelter (2009) Responding to youth homelessness following the G v LB Southwark judgment

*Another key issue is age limits, particularly the lower age limit. At the moment, we and most of the agencies that we deal with can work with an individual only when they are 16, whereas a lot of the valuable work that can be done to prevent future problems needs to be done before the young person reaches that age. It is about linking some of the children's services with some of the mainstream services for the 16-plus age group.<sup>45</sup>*

Youth workers and community youth services have an important role to play for this group.

## **Young People**

### **Statistics**

Analysis of the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey data in 2015 showed that young people were more than three times as likely, compared to other age groups, to have experienced homelessness in the last five years<sup>46</sup>. In 2018-19, 24.3% (8,869) of homeless applications in Scotland were from households where the lead applicant was between 16 and 24 years old. This is a lower proportion than the year before (25.4%, 9,032) and a continuation of a longer term downwards trend in the proportion of homeless applications from younger households<sup>47</sup>.

For the 16 - 24 age range, the gender balance is consistently around 54% female and 46% male<sup>48</sup>. Across all age ranges, the balance switches to 54% male and 46% female<sup>49</sup>, meaning young women are disproportionately likely to present as homeless to their council. This could be interpreted to indicate that males and females take different housing routes as they get older, for example with young women accessing different support when they become mothers. Although the majority of applicants in 2018-19 were single (72%), 21% of young homeless households also included children.

The most common immediate trigger of homelessness for the 16 - 24 year old age group is being 'asked to leave' (39%), followed by a non-violent dispute or relationship breakdown within the household (19%)<sup>50</sup>. As would be expected, the largest number of young people were made homeless from the family home (3,210, 46%), but 16% (1,130) had previously been living with friends or a partner and 9% (620) were made homeless from a private rented tenancy.

There is clear evidence that a number of factors are associated with increased risk of homelessness for young people including: experiencing abuse or neglect as a child; experiencing domestic violence, mental health or substance issues within the family home<sup>51</sup>; running away as a child<sup>52</sup>; truanting or being excluded from school or leaving school with no

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<sup>45</sup> Equal Opportunities Committee (2012)

<sup>46</sup> Watts et al. (2015)

<sup>47</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Youth Homelessness in Scotland 2018 -19: statistics

<sup>48</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Youth Homelessness

<sup>49</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Equalities breakdown

<sup>50</sup> Scottish Government (2019) Youth Homelessness

<sup>51</sup> Quilgars, D., Johnsen, S., & Pleace, N. (2008) Youth Homelessness in the UK: A Decade of Progress? York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>52</sup> Shelter Scotland. (2011) Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?

qualifications<sup>53</sup>; and being a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender young person<sup>54</sup>. Young people with experience of the criminal justice system are also more likely than their peers, and more likely than other age groups leaving custody, to become homeless<sup>55</sup>. In addition to there being known factors that increase the risk of youth homelessness, it is also known that homelessness at a young age increases the risk of later homelessness. Research for Crisis found that the earlier a person becomes homeless, the greater the likelihood that they will have five or more homeless experiences. 67% of people who became homeless below the age of 16 had faced five or more homeless experiences, compared to 11% of people who became homeless aged 41 and over<sup>56</sup>.

## Care Leavers

Care-experienced young people face a substantially higher risk than their peers of becoming homeless in adult life. For example, The National Audit Office found that in England one third of care leavers became homeless within the first two years of leaving care, and 25% of homeless people have been in care at some point in their lives<sup>57</sup>. Local authorities have particular responsibilities for looked after children, young people and care leavers as the Corporate Parent, which extends in some cases to the age of 24<sup>58</sup>. The Prevention of Homelessness Guidance states that care leavers should never leave the looked-after system without careful advance joint planning to ensure that they do not enter the homelessness system at all<sup>59</sup>.

The Independent Care Review, which reported in February 2020, has carried out an in-depth investigation into the issues facing care leavers in Scotland . They noted that the key elements which inform a positive transitional pathway from care to sustainable accommodation for care leavers already exist in published strategies and policies<sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup>. However, a national survey by CELCIS found that there are significant variations in the interpretation of national policy into local practice, with evidence that key actions are not always implemented<sup>62</sup>.

In May 2019 the 'A Way Home Scotland Coalition' were tasked by the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Group with creating a Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway for care leavers. The new Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway, 'Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathways'<sup>63</sup> sets out steps to prevent care leavers from being affected by homelessness at any point after leaving care. It has been developed by the Coalition's multi-agency working group

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<sup>53</sup> Llamau (2015) Study of the Experiences of Young Homeless People (SEYHoPe): Key findings & implications, Cardiff: Llamau.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Kennedy Trust (2014) LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK national scoping of cause, prevalence, response and outcome

<sup>55</sup> Glover J and Clewett N (2011) No fixed abode: The housing struggle for young people leaving custody in England, Essex: Barnardo's.

<sup>56</sup> Mackie, P. and Thomas, I. (2014) Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain, London: Crisis

<sup>57</sup> National Audit Office (2015) Care leavers' transition to adulthood

<sup>58</sup> Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

<sup>59</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2009)

<sup>60</sup> Scottish Government, CELCIS and A Way Home Scotland (2019) Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway: Improving care leavers housing pathways

<sup>61</sup> E.g. [Staying Put Scotland - Providing Care Leavers With Connectedness and Belonging](#)

<sup>62</sup> McGhee et al (2014) Thoroughcare and Aftercare in Scotland Local Authorities: A National Study, Glasgow: CELCIS

<sup>63</sup> [Youth Homelessness Prevention Pathway Improving Care Leavers Housing Pathway](#)

and youth steering group 'Aff the Streets', in partnership with Celcis. Recommendations focus on two themes, of practice and culture, including engagement to cultivate a sense of shared aims, review of transition services and data gathering; and on frameworks and systems, including access to benefits, and analysis of good practice around aftercare services to avoid going down a homelessness route.

### **Youth Homelessness Prevention Responses**

As well as the care leavers pathway, a more general youth homelessness pathway is currently in development, led by the A Way Home coalition.

An investigation was conducted by the youth homelessness charity Centrepoin into the effectiveness of youth homelessness intervention, reviewing evaluations of six projects and evidence submitted by 29 organisations. Four principles were identified as increasing the likelihood that an intervention would successfully prevent youth homelessness, and can be applied to a range of service provision. The four key principles were:

- Multi-agency working
- having a single front door for young people to access a range of services
- a whole family approach
- positive professional relationships with service users<sup>64</sup>.

There are resonances in these findings with the GIRFEC principles outlined above.

Below are brief introductions to six of the most prevalent youth homeless prevention approaches.

#### **1. Early Identification and prevention**

Given that the risk factors and triggers for youth homelessness are well understood, there can be opportunities for early identification. Indeed, the Prevention of Homelessness Guidance states that those at risk 'can be identified early and certainly before they reach 16 years of age'<sup>65</sup>.

One such model for early intervention is provided by The Geelong Project (TGP) in Australia, which is a schools-based multi-agency approach<sup>66</sup>. The objective of TGP, and the initiatives that have followed it, is to identify early youth who are at risk of homelessness, school disengagement, and other significant challenges. There is a shared responsibility for jointly identifying and referring students at risk. Referral decisions are data driven and use a multi-stage population screening process to identify young people at risk of homelessness. All students complete a Student Needs Survey, and the results are compared with additional observational data from teachers and counsellors. Once identified, the partnership approach

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<sup>64</sup> Centrepoin (2016)

<sup>65</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2009) Prevention of Homelessness Guidance

<sup>66</sup> Contributions to TGP have been from agencies across homelessness, youth justice, family violence, mental health, disability, education and employment, recreation, cultural diversity and aboriginal services. The Geelong Project (2013) [PROSPECTUS: Service system reform for the prevention of youth homelessness and disengagement from education.](#)

provides supports that will effectively reduce these risks, stabilise youths' housing, strengthen relationships with their families, and keep youth in their communities<sup>67</sup>. This is through a three-tiered response ranging from active monitoring by school staff to 'wrap-around' case management. The model's ability to function longitudinally and flexibly is crucial to achieving efficient service delivery and improved homelessness outcomes<sup>68</sup>.

An evaluation of TGP demonstrated the particular efficacy of partnerships between schools, social service providers, and other community resources in delivering early interventions<sup>69</sup>, especially when a "youth-centred, family-focused approach" is taken<sup>70</sup>. Results indicated that between 2013-2016 the number of youth entering the homelessness support system declined by 40%, with the research identifying a causal link to TGP<sup>71</sup>.

## 2. Family mediation

Given the high proportion of young people that leave (or are asked to leave) the family home due to relationship breakdown, it is logical for an intervention specifically directed at repairing relationships to provide part of the prevention response. Various mediation models are used to support young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. For example, mediation may be implemented directly by local authority homelessness officers, or by commissioned independent mediators; it can be delivered while the young person is still at home and/or once they have presented as homeless. A review of evidence by Centrepoin<sup>72</sup> found that mediation should be impartial and not solely focussed on return home, mediators should work closely with other delivery agencies to provide a holistic package of support, and mediation is most effective when implemented early (i.e. before crisis point)<sup>72</sup>. According to a recent Crisis review of local authority RRTPs, six of Scotland's 32 local authorities mention that they currently have dedicated youth mediation services, with nine others stating that they have plans in place to establish them<sup>73</sup>.

The Housing Options Guidance outlines that, as well as potentially enabling a young person at risk of homelessness to stay in the family home, if the young person does move out mediation may also encourage these relationships to support the young person within their own tenancy, maximising tenancy sustainment<sup>74</sup>. Watts et al. highlight that, amongst other approaches, there is little substantial evidence regarding the effectiveness of different approaches to family mediation, lighter-touch conciliation work and whole-family/parenting support in preventing

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<sup>67</sup> Gaetz, S. & Dej, E. (2017) A new direction: A framework for homelessness prevention. Toronto: Canadian Homelessness Research Network Press

<sup>68</sup> Schwan, K., French, D., Gaetz, S., Ward, A., Akerman, J., & Redman, M. (2018) Preventing youth homelessness An international review of evidence, Cardiff: The Wales Centre for Public Policy

<sup>69</sup> Poppe, B. & Gale, K. (2018) Unlocking doors to homelessness prevention: Solutions for preventing homelessness and eviction. Colmar, PA: HealthSpark Foundation.

<sup>70</sup> MacKenzie, D. (2018). Interim report: The Geelong project 2016-2017

<sup>71</sup> Ibid

<sup>72</sup> Centrepoin (2016)

<sup>73</sup> Dunn (2020)

<sup>74</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2016) Housing Options Guidance

youth homelessness<sup>75</sup>. Indeed, due to the scarcity of evidence a recent review of international evidence on youth homelessness prevention refers more broadly to strengthening family and natural supports rather than focussing on mediation per se<sup>76</sup>.

### **3. Shared Tenancies**

Sharing can be a valuable option for young people, providing companionship, mutual support and splitting the costs of rent and bills, and for many young people going through further or higher education it is a default pathway. Housing Options Guidance states that ‘there is no intrinsic reason why [sharing] shouldn’t be a viable option for customers that approach Options teams in housing need’<sup>77</sup>. Sharing for young people is also a principle built into the welfare system, with Local Housing Allowances rates for people under 35 restricted to an amount that would facilitate sharing but not a self-contained property. (There continues to be a shortfall in LHA even in shared properties. One analysis finding it to be unaffordable on LHA in 55% of Broad Rental Market Areas in Scotland<sup>78</sup>. However, recent uplifts in LHA rates due to COVID19 may mitigate this to some extent.)

There is not a strong culture of sharing in Scotland. Sanders and Dobie’s investigation into shared tenancies in Scotland reported stakeholder views that more investment in resources and staff training/ support many local authority would be necessary to overcome challenges in establishing this kind of provision would be difficult to overcome. These challenges included how to alleviate any risk to young people, a lack of culture of sharing, how best to engage landlords and the need to learn more about their private rented sector<sup>79</sup>. At the time of the research in 2015 there was only one incidence of an established scheme offering specific support for young people claiming the SAR across seven case study areas.

Rock Trust has a well-established scheme for young people, where “supportive flatmates” are recruited, often from students studying relevant subjects, to provide light-touch onsite support in exchange for free rent<sup>80</sup>. Other options for sharing include sharing in temporary accommodation and in social housing, although the Scottish Secure Tenancy is generally understood to create a barrier to this.

### **4. Supported Lodgings**

Supported Lodgings schemes provide young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness with a room of their own in the home of a vetted and trained private household, with support to the ‘host’ household and young person provided by a specialist organisation. Supported Lodgings are a well-established form of provision in some parts of England and (for care leavers) in Scotland, but there is no standard shape to such schemes at present. A key and

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<sup>75</sup> Watts et al. (2015)

<sup>76</sup> Schwan et al. (2018)

<sup>77</sup> Scottish Government and COSLA (2016)

<sup>78</sup> Where affordability is defined as being able to access less than 20% of the market. Basran, J. (2019) Cover the Cost: How gaps in Local Housing Allowance are impacting homelessness. London: Crisis.

<sup>79</sup> Sanders, B. and Dobie, S. (2015) Sharing in Scotland: Supporting young people who are homeless on the Shared Accommodation Rate, Online: Crisis

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.rocktrust.org/volunteering-in-our-support-services/>

unique feature of Supported Lodgings is the nature of the support available to young people, combining professional and specialist support from the provider agency, payment of rent and support to the hosts, along with the more informal, day-to-day, and 'within-home' support provided by the host. Placements tend to last from six months to two years, but can be shorter-term<sup>81</sup>. A recent investigation into supported lodgings in Scotland concluded that it offers a well-established, tried and tested means of addressing a series of challenges related to youth homelessness. Watts and Blenkinsop also comment that supported lodgings is an initiative strongly supported by those working in the sector and that the approach goes with the grain of current policy and service development in this area<sup>82</sup>.

## 5. Nightstop

Nightstop provides young people with accommodation in the homes of approved volunteers for short periods. The stay is far shorter than with supported lodgings: for example, the Rock Trust project in Edinburgh routinely offers up to two weeks. It is usually used for emergency accommodation and may also be used for respite, aiming to prevent young people from entering the formal homeless system by providing a period of time and space for the young person and their family. Respite housing can bolster motivation for families and caregivers to seek and engage in supportive interventions<sup>83</sup>. During the time a young person is in the accommodation, support such as mediation is put in place to prevent the breakdown of current accommodation arrangements, if possible, or identify and secure longer term accommodation. As well as providing a more appropriate form of emergency accommodation for young people than, for example, traditional hostels, this kind of accommodation can stop the escalation of emotions within a family and prevent some young people from becoming homeless as an early intervention<sup>84</sup>. A 2010 evaluation of the DePaul nightstop service in England indicated that 21% of youth returned to their family home, 36% moved into supported housing, 14% obtained independent accommodation, 11% moved into social housing and 14% moved in with a friend<sup>85</sup>.

## 6. Housing First for youth

The Scottish Government is currently promoting and investing in Housing First. Although the model has been well evidenced for broader populations, there has been less investigation into its effectiveness and appropriateness for young people. Issues may include the age and maturity of young clients, access to housing and benefits, and whether providing a young person with a Housing First tenancy could be rushing them to independence<sup>86</sup>. However, one evaluation of a Housing First project specifically for 16 - 24 year olds found a housing retention rate of 95% after the first year and increases in income stability and access to services<sup>87</sup>. In his

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<sup>81</sup> Watts, B. and Blenkinsop, J. (2018) Supported Lodgings Exploring the feasibility of long-term community hosting as a response to youth homelessness in Scotland, Online: Shelter

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Day, C. & Paul, C. (2007). Protecting young people from homelessness and escalating drug and alcohol use. *Housing, Care and Support*, 10(2), 15-22.

<sup>84</sup> Equal Opportunities Committee (2012)

<sup>85</sup> Insley, E. (2011) *Staying safe: An evaluation of Nightstop services*. Sussex: Insley Consulting.

<sup>86</sup> Gaetz, S., (2014) Think Piece: Can Housing First Work for Youth? In *European Journal of Homelessness* Volume 8, No. 2, 159 - 176

<sup>87</sup> Scott, F. and Harrison, S.J. (2013) Calgary, Alberta: The Infinity Project, in: S. Gaetz, F. Scott and T. Gulliver (Eds.) *Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness*, pp.61-75.

analysis for the European Journal of Homelessness, Gaetz concludes that Housing First can work for young people, but that the model must be adapted based upon an understanding of the developmental, social and legal needs of young persons<sup>88</sup>. The Rock Trust currently has the first Housing First for youth project in the UK with five tenancies for young people leaving care in West Lothian in partnership with Almond Housing Association<sup>89</sup>, and eight local authorities have plans to develop Housing First for Youth through their Rapid Rehousing Transition Plans<sup>90</sup>.

### **Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway**

In recent years the needs of young homeless people have been the focus of particular attention in England through the development of the 'Positive Youth Accommodation Pathway'<sup>91</sup> developed by St Basil's youth homelessness charity. The 'Positive Pathway' is a nationwide framework for local authorities and their partners to develop a collaborative and integrated approach to service development and delivery. It aims to give a clear set of steps to prevent young people aged 16 – 25 from becoming homeless and sets out the sort of services and support needed to help young people who do become homeless to build a more positive future. There are five stages to the Positive Pathway, which are not intended to be sequential or linear:

1. Information and advice for young people and families which is available to everyone in the local area
2. Early Help, targeted at young people and their families who may be at higher risk of homelessness
3. A Prevention Hub - using a joint approach between Housing, Children's Services and other partners to resolve a housing crisis quickly. This also contains a single access point or gateway to commissioned accommodation and support.
4. Commissioned accommodation and flexible support, based on what works well and developed according to local needs
5. A range of housing options for young people – affordable and safe housing options when young people are ready to succeed living independently<sup>92</sup>.

A rapid evaluation by Sheffield Hallam University found that, where implemented, the Positive Pathway Model has a significant impact on local authority practice and provision including their use of data and their understanding of the needs of younger people. Local authorities reported that this led to improved services, more effective use of scarce resources and better outcomes for younger people. 80% of local authorities reported that there had been some or major improvement in strategic and collaborative approaches to youth homelessness<sup>93</sup>. The hub was identified as being the core element of the model and key to its success. Outreach and promotion of the scheme through St Basil's Youth Homelessness Advisory Service was really

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<sup>88</sup> Gaetz (2014)

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.rocktrust.org/housing-first-for-youth/>

<sup>90</sup> Dunn (2020) Rapid rehousing transition plans: a Scottish overview. Crisis

<sup>91</sup> [Positive Pathway Framework](#)

<sup>92</sup> St Basils (2019) Positive Pathway Framework

<sup>93</sup> Green, S., McCarthy, L., Pattison, B., (2017) The Positive Pathway Model: A Rapid Evaluation of its Impact, Sheffield: Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University

important in ensuring buy in and effective implementation. The 2018 Homeless Link youth homelessness survey found that 66% of local authorities in England were using or developing the Positive Pathway model in their area<sup>94</sup>.

### **Missing Young People**

Missing young people who run away are a group neither covered by the first section of this briefing - mainly directed towards considering children within households led by an adult that are at risk of homelessness - nor the second section - young people age 16 - 24 who become homeless as their own 'household'.

This group of children/ young people are most often in their early teenage years who have 'run away' from - or been forced to leave - home, and many do not wish to return. 62% of missing people in Scotland are children or young people, often going missing from care or residential settings. One in six of those missing overnight sleep rough or with strangers<sup>95</sup>. Whether they have been registered officially as a 'missing person' with the police or not, often these young people stay in highly unstable and inappropriate situations<sup>96</sup>. A small scale study of young homeless people found that 63% who had run away had also experienced sleeping rough. The study found that the vast majority of young homeless people (84%) had run away before the age of 16 and for most running away was more than a one-off occurrence. One in five (22 %) had run away at least ten times. Those who have run away before the age of 16 may be at higher risk of homelessness later in life<sup>97</sup>.

Any consideration of youth homeless prevention should consider a response to this group: these young people are themselves -at least temporarily- homeless, are at risk of repeat episodes of running, and running away is a strong indicator of future episodes of homelessness.

There are a range of procedures that should be in place in relation to children who go missing. Local child protection committees should have multi-agency procedures<sup>98</sup>, Scottish Government has a service to help co-ordinate work in this area<sup>99</sup>, and in 2017 the Scottish Government published its first National Missing Persons Framework, with a strong emphasis on young people. The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provides local authorities with powers to provide short-term refuge for children or young people who appear to be at risk of harm and who request refuge. Most young people will struggle to ask for help and they may not be considered to meet the threshold of need for social work services, particularly as they approach the age of 16. However, homelessness and housing services also are unlikely to engage with them as a young person under the age of 16 cannot hold their own tenancy.

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<sup>94</sup> Homeless Link (2018)

<sup>95</sup> Scottish Government (2017) National Missing Persons Framework for Scotland

<sup>96</sup> Watts et al. (2015)

<sup>97</sup> Shelter Scotland (2011) Running away and future homelessness – the missing link?

<sup>98</sup> Scottish Government (2014) National guidance for child protection in Scotland

<sup>99</sup> Scottish Government (2018) Children missing from education (Scotland) service: service guidance

The Missing Persons Framework suggests that mediation services and return discussions after having been missing have an important role in understanding what is going for a young person and addressing these issues to prevent recurrence or escalation. This could also be relevant to a homelessness prevention agenda.

### **Areas for potential consideration in relation to prevention duties**

- How effectively does the GIRFEC framework interact with the prevention of homelessness, and are there strong enough links between children's service and homelessness departments, including where a referral is made? Are there lessons to be gained or areas the frameworks could be strengthened? What responsibility should the "named person" have for identifying homelessness risk? What is needed to support this?
- What is the role of schools in preventing homelessness? The Geelong Project has provided a strong example of using evidence to screen for risk of youth homelessness in the school setting. Importantly, it is a model that involves multiple agencies taking responsibility. Is this a model that we can learn anything from?
- Where a child is at risk of homelessness, is further clarity needed around the legal responsibilities towards them and their wider family?
- Is greater clarity needed around responsibilities for accommodating young people aged 16 and 17?
- The Ending Homelessness Together High-Level Action Plan includes a clear aim around preventing youth homelessness. How can the work that the review group do around a prevention duty ensure that it dovetails with other developments in this area e.g. the development of Local Authority RRTPs and work on national youth homelessness prevention pathways?
- How could a homelessness prevention duty link up to frameworks and support for missing young people?
- The Scottish Government's Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017 sets clear targets for reducing child poverty across Scotland. Could homelessness prevention activities interact with local authorities' duties to compile Local Child Poverty Action Plans? As another critical partner regarding poverty, it might be worth considering whether Jobcentre Plus could have a role, despite being under the jurisdiction of Westminster government. There may also be consideration of whether support services such as food banks could be included somehow in processes developed for the prevention duty, despite not being a statutory body.

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