

Young people's housing transitions

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ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited

A look at the issues facing young people when they move to independent living.

Issues affecting young people's ability to access independent housing are rising up the political agenda. In a series of UK-wide discussions and events, young people and practitioners working with young people gave their views on the housing options available to young people and whether these meet their needs and aspirations. It identified emerging trends, barriers young people face and examples of good practice. The report:

- highlights a lack of appropriate housing options for young people;
- identifies the transition to independent living as a process rather than a one-off event;
- looks at young people's long- and short-term housing aspirations;
- highlights the preparation and support needed for independent living; and
- provides ideas for the future.

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Executive summary

In a series of UK-wide discussions and events, young people and practitioners working with young people gave their views on issues surrounding the transition to independent living. The discussions covered difficulties that young people faced and examples of good practice.

Key points

- Participants in the discussions saw the transition to independent living as a process rather than a one-off event. Practitioners felt it was essential to allow young people to 'fail' or change direction during this process.
- A flexible support network was seen as vital in enabling young people to make the transition to independent living.
- Discussions highlighted the lack of an appropriate range of affordable housing options for young people in all housing tenures.
- Although many young people voiced a strong aspiration for home ownership, for others a social housing tenancy was a key aspiration in itself. Practitioners raised a need to rethink the home ownership 'ideal'.
- Young people wanted more flexibility in the housing system. Some practitioners wanted to see more 'portable' products that would allow young people to move around more easily, and questioned the inflexibility of the standard social housing tenancy. The private rented sector was considered too expensive.
- Despite mixed views on shared living, practitioners suggested this arrangement may have to become more common in future, particularly in the social rented sector.

- Education in schools and internet information sites were identified as important ways to prepare young people for independent living.
- Young people often felt negatively stereotyped by society, which can adversely affect the housing opportunities offered to them.

The research

Background

Young people across the UK face increasing difficulty in finding suitable independent housing as the problems of affordability and accessibility restrict the options available to them. Until 2008 house prices had been rising consistently across the UK with some areas (e.g. Northern Ireland) experiencing dramatic increases in the past few years. This has made home ownership unattainable for most young people, even on a shared ownership basis. Allocation policies for social housing may not work in favour of young people unless they are considered to be in a priority grouping. While the private rented sector offers the possibility of independent living, it is perceived by some as a temporary measure where rents are too high and there is a lack of security.

Transition to independent living

The transition to independent living was seen by participants in the study as a process over time, not a one-off event. When young people leave home early that process is compressed and problems can arise. Many participants had moved

between different housing situations, including social housing, parental homes, private renting, hostels and staying with friends. Young people need time to adapt to independent living, so availability and continuity of support are important.

Many practitioners felt it was essential to allow young people to 'fail' or change direction without being judged negatively. It is normal in adult life to go backwards and forwards towards a goal, rather than always in a straight line.

Support networks for transition

Many examples of informal and formal support networks were mentioned by participants in the study, including buddying, mentors, 'aunties' (older students supporting younger ones) in student accommodation, lodging schemes, family, peer support and support workers. The existence of a support network was considered vital in aiding transition to independent living:

It is about having someone there, that they can trust and if things don't work out they can go to.

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

Some participants felt all young people should have access to support workers, including those moving out of the family home. This raises the question whether there should be an extension of the Government-funded Connexions Direct service for 13 to 19 year olds to include young people over 19 and provide support to them when needed.

Lack of appropriate housing options for young people

Practitioners and young people felt there is a lack of appropriate options for young people in different circumstances at different stages of their lives. The experiences of many young people showed that making the transition to suitable long-term housing is not a linear process and could involve several different types of housing. Some young people viewed home ownership as their ultimate goal but saw private renting and social renting as 'stepping stones' on the way. Some practitioners viewed flexibility across the board in the housing system as an important issue.

There was a call for quality youth housing provision with more specialist youth-oriented

housing projects. Participants suggested the provision of schemes that work together to help young people progress through supported and semi-supported housing to independent living.

Participants felt there is a shortage of accommodation to move on to and a lack of housing provision for some specific groups of young people, including young offenders (particularly prolific offenders), teenage parents, people leaving care, drug offenders, people with learning difficulties and single young men.

Home ownership and a flexible housing system

The majority of young people participating in the events across the UK viewed home ownership as their ultimate goal, although a range of external factors made that seem unattainable, as the gap between their income and house prices was too great. This frustration particularly applied to those who had been through the 'hoops' of tertiary education, qualifications and obtaining employment. Shared ownership schemes offered a possibility but eligibility criteria prevented many from applying, and schemes were often oversubscribed.

Some felt a council or housing association tenancy was a more realistic option as an end goal.

Practitioners raised the question that if home ownership is no longer a realistic option, maybe society needs to rethink its perception of home ownership as the 'norm' in the UK. Alternative suggestions put forward included more flexibility between types of occupancy/ownership with the possibility of two-way movement between them. For example, the flexibility to climb the housing ladder across different types of housing would allow people to cope with changes in income and family circumstances.

Flexibility within social housing provision

Practitioners and young people across the UK felt young people are not given enough consideration in social housing allocation. Suggestions for improvement included the introduction of a category for young people in the points system and greater local consistency through a single unified waiting list for social housing. Homelessness is often seen as the only route into

social housing, although this assumption was challenged by practitioners in the study.

Once allocated a social tenancy, there is no provision for young people to move around. If they do not want to stay in the same location, they can end up losing their tenancy. By their very nature, young people are 'mobile', going through a time of changes and transitions. Some practitioners questioned the appropriateness of a standard social housing tenancy for life, with a view to considering ways of providing more 'portable' products.

There could be more flexibility in the social housing system. For example, one new initiative between a homelessness organisation in England and a housing association allows tenants to surrender part of their rent each month as a saving towards a deposit for home ownership.

The role of the private rented sector

Participants recognised there has been an increase in the role of the private rented sector for young people, particularly for those in their mid twenties. They said that many young people were in private rented accommodation as a substitute for owner-occupation because of the constraints they faced.

The appeal and accessibility of the private rented sector are limited by high rents, lack of security and the poor physical condition of some properties. Practitioners felt that greater value needed to be placed on the private rented sector by Government and local authorities to increase its appeal, but this would have implications for Housing Benefit and housing renewal policy.

Participants felt landlords often view young people as high-risk tenants. An example of a new initiative that aims to remove these preconceptions is a housing association in Wales that rents from private landlords and then sublets to young people. The scheme links into support services, gives six months' notice to tenants if they have to leave and helps them find new accommodation. Rents are within Housing Benefit levels. The Single Room Rent level for under-25s for Housing Benefit was questioned by many young people and practitioners who pointed out that utility costs were no lower for young people.

Both practitioners and young people felt high rents in a low-wage economy can act as

a disincentive to young people to move out of benefit dependency, as wages would not match benefit levels. One practitioner would like to see the introduction of rents relating to the percentage of a person's salary.

Shared living arrangements

Some young people and some practitioners felt shared living could play a positive role in helping young people learn to live independently, with peer support, whereas others felt young people needed their own space.

In owner-occupation, practitioners noted that shared buying between friends and also between strangers was becoming more common, but felt they had insufficient information to judge how successful this arrangement is.

The events highlighted that there is no established culture of sharing living accommodation in the social rented sector, whereas it is standard practice for students. Some practitioners felt the 'gold standard' of solo living – which has been a big part of the social rented sector for a long time – may have to shift. One practitioner felt this was a key area where further research was needed to prompt more creative solutions. Several young people did not like the idea of sharing and would only consider sharing with people they had known for a long time.

Practitioners provided examples of new initiatives across the UK with shared living arrangements. One organisation felt there was a gap between 24-hour supported accommodation and independent living. They had developed an intermediary shared living arrangement where young people could benefit from peer support as well as floating support. Another initiative aimed to help young people link up with potential suitable sharers, and included discussion in advance of the kind of things that might go wrong and how to deal with them.

Preparation for independent living

Many young people in the study were unaware of the services and housing opportunities available to them and felt ill-prepared for independent living. A recurrent theme was the important role education in schools could play in preparing young people for the realities of finding and living in independent accommodation. The role of peer educators was

given as a good-practice example.

Independent living skills need to be developed prior to moving into accommodation. They go beyond budgeting and cooking skills, to dealing with peer pressure, getting on with neighbours, communication skills and keeping the house clean.

Some young people felt the internet was an underdeveloped resource in the housing sector and were not aware of specific sites focusing on young people's housing issues and needs. It was suggested online services could provide general information on housing options and direct people to local specialist services for in-depth support or advice. Some young people said they would like to see real-life stories and watch videos on YouTube.

In terms of seeking advice, some young people said they did not know what to ask for and would like information on how to prepare for moving into their own home. One organisation working with young people has prepared a booklet for parents to help them talk to young people about what is involved in leaving home.

Society's attitude to young people

Some practitioners felt young people are not valued sufficiently by society. Young people often felt misrepresented and negatively stereotyped, which can minimise the opportunities provided to them. They wanted to be listened to and involved in decision-making processes and wanted services to be tailored to individual needs. It was felt that organisations that deal with young people should be more adept at working with them – for example, staff should be trained in working with this age group.

Conclusion

The main housing transition issues that emerged from the discussions with young people and practitioners working with young people were the current shortage of suitable, affordable, independent housing options for young people; the need for support and information to help them progress through different types of accommodation towards their final housing goal; and problems caused by negative social stereotyping of young people, which reduced the opportunities available to them.

Priorities for the future were for Government and society to place greater value and emphasis on young people; for more quality youth housing provision; and for more flexibility with provision of 'portable' products that would enable young people to move around more easily. Improved education, support and information on youth housing were also considered important.

About the project

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited carried out initial telephone interviews with a range of general and specialist practitioners working with young people across the UK, including housing providers, advice services, support providers and employment and young people's services. These helped shape, inform and recruit participants to a half-day event held in each of the four UK administrations where workshops took place enabling separate and joint conversations between young people and practitioners. The events took place in Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and Birmingham in April 2008. The study was also informed by young people's views on the blog page www.youngpeoplemovingon.org.uk.

1 Introduction

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited carried out a series of four UK-wide conversations with young people and practitioners working with young people aged 16 to 30, looking at current trends in the transition to independent living for young people, particularly focusing on examples of good practice and also what barriers young people might face.

ECOTEC carried out initial telephone interviews with a range of generalist and specialist practitioners working with young people across the UK, including housing providers, advice services, support providers and employment and young people's services. ECOTEC also spoke to some academic researchers. These helped shape, inform and recruit to a half-day event held in each of the four UK administrations where workshops took place, enabling both separate and joint conversations between young people and practitioners. The events took place in community-based venues in Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and Birmingham over a two-week period in April 2008.

A web log or blog was created and managed after the events for young people and practitioners working with young people to have their say and share in the discussions.

Background

Young people across the UK face increasing difficulty in attaining independent housing of choice as problems of affordability and accessibility restrict the options available to them. Until 2008 house prices had been increasing consistently across the UK with some areas (e.g. Northern Ireland) experiencing dramatic increases in the past few years, making home ownership unattainable for most young people despite a variety of shared ownership schemes. Allocation policies for social housing may be a barrier to a young person unless they are considered to be in a priority grouping. While the private rented

sector offers the possibility of independent living it can be perceived by some as a more transient measure where rents are too high and there is lack of security.

Aim of study

The study aimed to look at the range of housing options available to young people and whether these meet the needs and aspirations of young people themselves. As well as considering issues such as access to and affordability of housing, the study also looked at emerging trends in young people's housing transitions, barriers they faced and good-practice examples in service provision. In addition, the study began to explore the wider role of education, information services and support networks in aiding young people to achieve successful and sustainable housing transitions.

Young people's and practitioners' views were obtained in a series of conversation events, with one event held in each of the four UK countries. These events allowed for both separate and joint conversations with young people and practitioners working with young people. The views obtained from these events were supplemented with views obtained from a blog set up and monitored by ECOTEC at www.youngpeoplemovingon.org.uk. Full details of the methodology for the study are provided in the Appendix.

One of the purposes of the study is to highlight general as well as specific UK themes. The four UK countries have different socio-economic characteristics, different housing and related needs, and different political operating environments. The study identifies common themes and trends, as well as reflecting issues relevant to different locations.

Chapter 2 considers the housing options available to young people; Chapter 3 explores the nature of young people's housing transitions. Chapter 4 illustrates the issues raised around

flexibility in the housing system, with Chapter 5 highlighting concerns around young people's preparation for independent living. Chapter 6 looks at the types of support young people highlighted as helping them through housing transitions. The report concludes with ideas for the future that were raised by young people and practitioners. The issues raised throughout the report were generated by participants in the study.

2 Lack of appropriate housing options

Key points

- Practitioners and young people highlighted a lack of appropriate options for young people in different circumstances at different stages of their lives. The experiences of many young people showed that making the transition to suitable long-term housing is not a linear process and could involve many different types of housing.
- Some practitioners viewed flexibility across the board in the housing system as an important issue.
- There was a call for quality youth housing provision with more specialist youth-oriented housing projects. Further research is needed on their nature.
- Participants in the discussions felt there is a shortage of move-on accommodation and a lack of housing provision for some specific groups of young people, including young offenders (particularly prolific offenders), teenage parents, care leavers, drug offenders, people with learning difficulties and also single young men.
- The events raised questions about the role of shared living arrangements and attitudes towards sharing. Some young people and some practitioners felt shared living could play a positive role for younger people learning to live independently, particularly as regards peer support, whereas others felt young people needed their own space.
- Practitioners provided examples of new initiatives across the UK with shared living arrangements.

The study found that practitioners and young people across the UK felt there is a lack of appropriate options for young people in different circumstances at different stages of their lives. There is limited availability of suitable and affordable accommodation. The experiences of many young people showed that making the transition to suitable long-term housing is not a linear process and could involve many different types of housing.

The study first asked practitioners working with young people the question 'What are young people's housing and life aspirations?' Their replies all carried a similar message:

Uniform aspiration – nice house, nice area, good job and a family. May not be universal but still very consistent.

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

Most young people's expectations are similar to my own. For instance, most would like to live in an affordable house in a nice area and to work for a living.

(Practitioner, England)

However, they felt the reality could be very different with regard to available housing choices. The limited availability of suitable and affordable accommodation was a key message from all the events, from practitioners working with young people and young people themselves. This was also supported by comments on the blog. The wide range of personal circumstances of young people from the age of 16 to 30 highlighted a need for a similarly wide range of housing options.

If you are 25 to 30 and been working for a few years with a social network, you are in a different ballpark than those bouncing around homeless for 10 to 15 years.

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

In Belfast, practitioners expressed the view that there was a 'massive shortage of housing across the board – social housing, private renting and owner-occupied property. In social housing, one area of Belfast has not had a relet for two years'.

Buying a home was seen as too expensive for most young people. Some young people aged over 25 and practitioners aged under 30 at the events felt home ownership may become a more realistic consideration for young people in their mid to late twenties but is still inaccessible in the current housing market. Young people at all the events considered there was no shortage in the supply of private lets but that these were too expensive for most young people to access. Social housing was seen as the most common way of moving into independent living for several young people at each of the events as it was more affordable than private lets (in Edinburgh, for example, around £200 for a council flat per month compared to £600 for a privately rented two-bedroom flat, sharing with another person). However, the young people recognised that there was insufficient supply to meet the level of demand.

The lack of housing options for young people was seen by some practitioners as resulting in young people feeling their only possible route to securing accommodation was to apply as statutorily homeless. There was a concern that this may not be the best option for them.

If you are lucky enough to come from a fairly stable middle-class family then your housing needs may be planned out for you – go to university etc. – but if you are not from that situation, it is very difficult to know what the housing options are for you and that throws young people into declaring they are homeless. That's a big issue.

(Practitioner, England)

In addition, practitioners and young people commented on the lack of different types of accommodation for young people. For some young people, the lack of timely provision of appropriate accommodation can impact on the rest of their lives.

Young people with difficult situations will need housing solutions. The current stock of hostels and supported places will continue to struggle to meet the demands from young people. Lack of availability is a problem. We can make a referral but then the place is fully booked and then changes can take place to the young person while they are waiting.

(Practitioner, England)

Some practitioners felt that other issues affecting young people had their roots in the lack of affordable supply of different types of housing. Student debt is seen as putting more students at risk of homelessness, particularly international students.

'Choice' a hollow word

The personal circumstances of an individual – family background, income, age, life skills, behavioural issues, physical health, mental health, budgeting skills, peer groups etc. – influence their housing decisions, but the ability to make a 'choice' about a preferred housing option was often seen to be illusory or unrealistic. The lack of affordable supply in all tenures meant young people often had very few options and were making decisions on accommodation 'out of desperation rather than choice'. Young people in crisis situations do not have time to plan and just have to react to their housing situation.

The young people we work with, their targets are RSL or council flats at affordable rent. The idea of choice is actually a little bit empty – there are waiting lists, they won't have choice over temporary accommodation.

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

A young practitioner in Belfast aspired to home ownership but was living in private rental accommodation: 'It's not choosing to, it's the only choice'.

The poor quality of accommodation often offered to young people was also raised:

There is a lot of poor stock out there that is being offered to young people – social as well as private landlords. The quality is not good. People don't want it because it is not maintained well. We have a difficulty in that we want the accommodation to be of a certain standard for young people – it is a dignity issue for us.

(Practitioner, England)

New trends emerging

Practitioners felt the lack of suitable and affordable accommodation for young people was leading to the emergence of new trends in youth housing as young people adopt a range of strategies to cope with their housing difficulties. These measures include staying longer in the parental home where this is possible, 'sofa surfing' or accepting overcrowding in private rented accommodation.

On the blog, one person commented:

I have tried a number of different ways of leaving home, yet I find myself about to hit 30 and back at home living with my parents! Believe me, this is not by choice, I have no other option.

The problem with those coping strategies is that they tend to hide housing needs, and evidence of young people's housing problems can remain unregistered.

At the event in Cardiff, for example, one group of young people felt that sofa surfing is very common among young people and a growing trend. Sofa surfing is not necessarily perceived as homelessness by the young person or their peers, and therefore many young people do not seek help at this stage. Linked closely to this was the issue of lack of knowledge to access help and assistance.

A person can go from mates' to mates' sofas for months and months and it's never really registered as a huge problem.

(Practitioner, Cardiff)

This was felt to be particularly relevant in the rural context as one academic researcher commented:

One of the biggest issues in terms of housing need in the rural context is the difficulty of uncovering that need because need tends to become most apparent when there are services or facilities there to meet those needs and most of those services are located in the larger settlements in a rural context, in the larger towns and cities and so the issue becomes much more visible in those sort of spaces. You've got the difficult situation that if the services are not there to enumerate the problem and without being able to enumerate the problem, it is difficult to prove to others that there is a problem there.

Lack of appropriate specific provision

Practitioners and young people at all the events commented on the lack of supply of appropriate options and also on the lack of move-on accommodation. This was reinforced by comments on the blog including:

I work for a supported housing project for young people aged 16 to 25 ... the problems we face are trying to successfully move out our young people, due to the support we offer many are ready for their own home, but cannot afford to buy. However with the [city] housing stock so low, many of our residents have been told they will not get their own flat for up to five years. This is so disheartening for them and they end up moving in with friends or on to further supported accommodation that they do not need.

Certain groups of young people have particular issues in gaining access to independent living. These include, for example, young offenders (particularly prolific offenders), teenage parents, care leavers, young people with learning difficulties, young people with behavioural issues and drug offenders. At the Cardiff workshop, practitioners and young people felt there was a lack of suitable accommodation for young single men.

The needs of care leavers were highlighted:

In terms of people leaving care, planning starts too late on the whole although there are steps to improve that. There is still too much reliance on homelessness provision for care leavers and I don't think that is appropriate at all. I think for care leavers that comprehensive support package is often not there.

(Practitioner, England)

Some hostel provision was viewed by practitioners and young people at all the events as having a stigma attached and a negative image, which discouraged young people from using it. One group of young people felt they should not say 'hostel' as this sounded negative, preferring instead the term 'project'. Concerns were raised that hostels were unclean and unsafe – participants spoke of having their possessions stolen or ruined by other people, and incidences of alcoholism and drug use being rife.

In addition, participants felt trapped by the costs charged by hostels – this meant young people were unable to save for a deposit or rent to make the transition into social housing or private renting. Participants in Cardiff claimed hostel charges were higher than social housing, with service charges being between £25 and £35 a week in addition to their rent. One participant stated that the rent for one room in a hostel was £200 per week. One participant demonstrated how hostel charges were prohibitive – he used to work a 40-hour week as a hotel night porter, earning £6.75 per hour. This equated to £270 per week, so all his income was absorbed by rental charges. The participant stated: 'after tax and paying rent I have no money left so I might as well be on the dole'.

Practitioners in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh voiced their concern at the lack of move-on and mainstream accommodation for homeless young people. This was identified as an issue in prolonging the homelessness cycle and can discourage young people from their move to independent living. Young people in supported housing and temporary accommodation feel in limbo: 'They do have a flat but they are not in their own place'.

Location important

The importance of location was highlighted:

From our experience, location is very important. Sometimes more important than the type of accommodation. They may want to be near their family and support networks, or far away from their family.

(Practitioner, England)

In Belfast, the young people were committed to their area and did not want to move outside Belfast or Northern Ireland to access better jobs or higher salaries. There was felt to be a real lack of housing support to help people stay in their local area and progress through the housing journey they aspired to. The political situation also had a number of effects on the local housing market. In particular, it still reduced the extent to which young people could accept social housing in other areas. One practitioner commented that Catholics stay in Catholic areas and Protestants in Protestant areas. However, with social housing, 'if you put a choice down for a neutral place, the list is massive'.

At the Cardiff event, there was evidence of young people from the Valleys being displaced to Cardiff City to access hostel accommodation. For example, Caerphilly only has one hostel, while Cardiff has twelve. One participant had therefore been advised by Caerphilly housing department to relocate to Cardiff to enable him to access hostel provision. This suggests insufficient housing provision for young people in more rural areas/ lower-population densities, placing increased pressure on inner-city housing accommodation.

Practitioners in Cardiff spoke of the migration into Cardiff and the cities from rural areas as impacting on homelessness. The practitioners felt that Cardiff had a particular problem, as although many people were felt to be moving there to seek a better life and job prospects, there is not enough cheap housing available to cope with the demand.

Mixed views on shared living arrangements

The events raised questions about the role of shared living arrangements and attitudes towards sharing. Some young people and some practitioners felt shared living could play a positive role for younger people learning to live independently, particularly as regards peer support, whereas others felt young people needed their own space. Some practitioners commented that young people may think they want to live independently immediately but this may not always be the best choice. For example, Llamau in Wales runs a Friendly Lodging Scheme for young people leaving care, but

young people often don't want to go there as they want their own flat and we try to say why it would be good for them to live there to learn independent living skills for a while. So what I am saying is often young people will make choices that aren't necessarily best for them in the long run.

(Practitioner, Wales)

At the Edinburgh event, the role of sharing in different tenures was discussed among the practitioners. In social housing, there was an assumption that living alone was the 'gold standard' and yet practitioners raised the issue of isolation for young people. In private renting and owner-occupation including shared ownership, there was a financial push for young people to move in together because sharing was seen as the only way to make it affordable. This could be between people who knew each other and/or people who did not know each other. There were concerns about the problems that could arise in such shared living arrangements if relations broke down. It was also seen as a reason for couples to move in together when perhaps their relationship was not ready for shared living arrangements.

The comments of young people themselves varied, with some speaking of positive experiences while others had disliked sharing, feeling pressured into alcohol and drug abuse by other residents in some shared houses. In one Birmingham group, only one participant felt that moving in with friends

to share the rent and mortgage costs would make the transition to independent living less stressful. The other participants were too concerned that 'everything would go pear-shaped' if they fell out, one commenting 'that would not be secure at all'. Others were disparaging about the idea of sharing as they felt it would impinge on their independence, in that they would prefer their own space. Some felt they would only share with people they had known for a long time and could trust.

Comments on the blog reflected this range of views:

Sharing a house is great and I know people nearing their 40s who still live like that, but for most people there comes a point when you need your own space and privacy.

I enjoy living with so many individuals, but it can be hard at times because you all live in each other's pockets, and this can cause trouble between friends.

We share out of necessity, as we can't afford anything else.

Examples of service provision

Practitioners and young people at all the events were asked to provide examples of what they felt to be good practice in the current provision of young people's housing. These included:

- *Foyers*. Participants in the young people groups at the event in Birmingham were living in foyer accommodation in Birmingham and the Wirral. They felt this offered a positive step into independent living by providing 'semi-independent housing', with each resident having a studio flat with their own shower and kitchen. These participants emphasised the essential role of their support worker.
- *Supported lodgings*. Practitioners at the Birmingham event expressed mixed views on the success of supported lodgings. These services are aimed at young people, primarily care leavers, to provide support with the

transition to independent living. The Merseyside Accommodation Project (MAP) was mentioned as an example of a good-practice supported lodgings scheme providing 'family-style' accommodation support for young homeless people aged 16–18. Concerns were expressed about inadequate funding for the family providing the supported lodgings.

- *Specialised young persons' hostels.* These were seen as providing more specific support and a greater sense of personal safety than generic hostels. Two 17-year-old female participants who had applied to the local authority and been accepted as homeless at the age of 15 described mixed experiences in generic hostel accommodation, including finding themselves in hostels with much older men at one point. They both said they had felt particularly scared and insecure living there, and felt much happier when they were moved to a specialised young persons' hostel.
- *Shared living arrangements projects.* Several practitioners across the UK spoke positively of the Cyrenians project in Edinburgh, which had implemented sharing arrangements for people with medium to low support needs.

Preparation includes discussion in advance of how things might go wrong and how they would deal with this situation. In Wales, Llamau runs a Friendly Lodging Scheme for young people leaving care and they are hoping to access funding for a shared living arrangements project:

One thing that we have as an organisation is that we have a staged move from short-term 24-hour accommodation to long-term 24-hour accommodation to floating support in your own flat. We feel there is a gap between moving from 24-hour accommodation to your own flat. We want to develop more shared living accommodation types, in the same way that other young people who have left home in a planned way, gone to university, shared with friends, shared with other friends. It's another step towards independent living – there is support from peers.

(Practitioner, Wales)

- *Year-round student accommodation at Aston University.* Care leavers are offered year-round full-time accommodation to enable their studies.

3 Transition process

Key issues

- The transition to independent living was seen as a process, not a one-off event. Many participants moved between different housing situations, including social housing, parental homes, private renting, hostels and staying with friends.
- When young people leave home early that process is compressed and problems can result.
- Young people need time to become emotionally and physically comfortable with the concept of independent living, so availability and continuity of support are important.
- Linked to this, many practitioners felt it was essential to allow young people to 'fail' and/or change direction without making any value judgements about it. This was felt to reflect the reality of adult life where it is normal to go backwards and forwards in meeting one's aspirations, rather than always in a linear direction.

Practitioners in the events across the UK felt the transition to independent living was a process rather than a one-off event, requiring different types of housing at different stages in the process.

I think it is a process. Nobody leaves home and gets a house and stays there for the rest of their life. People go through different housing situations depending on their circumstances. It is a transition. When policy-makers are deciding about what type of housing stock needs to be developed, there isn't enough sophistication about different types of housing so that young people can have those.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Even in the shared ownership sector, one academic researcher commented:

There is an assumption that it is a complete stepping stone into home ownership, for some it is not. They have moved in and out because of relationship breakdown, or having plans that haven't come to fruition, and then moved back to private renting and then gone through the process again at a later stage. Then found they do want to settle or have a more permanent home.

The importance of viewing transition as a process is also that it allows young people to develop, learn, change their minds and make mistakes.

How many of us have ever gone in a straight line. Need to take small steps, and have the availability to go backwards and forwards and not feel that you have failed ... It is part of the norm of becoming an adult, of getting independence. Some young people may return to the parental home after an exploratory time away.

(Practitioner, Cardiff)

As an organisation we allow people to fail. Sometimes we do have to evict people, but we do allow them to come back ... We allow them backwards and forwards, because that is what life is about, we try to mirror that really, because that is really important.

(Practitioner, Cardiff)

Practitioners expressed concern that transition is often presented to young people as a 'big bang', a sudden change. They commented that it is when the process of transition becomes artificially compressed that problems present. This is particularly relevant for young people leaving care homes who have been looked after by the state

and then suddenly find themselves living on their own at an early age.

I think a lot of young people have to learn very grown-up skills at a very young age. Imagine at 16 or 17 to be expected to run your own household – it is a significant expectation really.
(Practitioner, Birmingham)

One young person who had made the transition from Young People’s Centre children’s homes to an independent living unit spoke of her difficulties even though she was supported by staff for six months:

There was a lot of pressure on me, I felt I was pushed into independent living, it was a case of either sinking or swimming.
(Young person, Edinburgh)

This young woman wanted to move into independent living but was ‘really frightened’ and felt isolation was an issue. She saw it as a challenge to be overcome and has ‘learnt a lot’ by managing to live independently. Another participant who had been through the care system described how difficult she had found the transition, and had asked to be sent back to the supported unit at one point.

Transition routes

The timeline exercises with young people at all the events provided strong evidence that making the transition to suitable long-term housing is not a linear process. For example:

- One participant was currently privately renting (female, aged 21), but this was seen as a stepping stone to social housing. Social housing was seen as more desirable as it was far more affordable. The participant was currently privately renting a two-bedroom flat with a friend, each paying rent of £600 per month. This is compared to around £200 rent in social housing. By the time the participant is 23, she aspires to be a council tenant or living in a housing association house, and then owning her own property by the time she is 30. This demonstrates that the transition

to independent living is not always a linear process of reduced reliance on family and the state into private renting and home ownership.

- Another participant (male, aged 22), had grown up in children’s homes and foster care. He had been given his first tenancy at the age of 16 in a housing association, but this was short-term, so between the ages of 18 and 21 he had been homeless, including living in shelters, hostels, bed and breakfasts, staying with friends, sleeping rough and travelling. He was given his second tenancy as a council tenant at the age of 21.

Examples of the timeline exercises are shown in Figures 1 and 2.

A gradual process

Comments from young people across the UK suggest young people could be better prepared to move into independent living. Becoming responsible for yourself and your finances was seen as a gradual process and is ‘quite hard’. Young people need time to become physically and emotionally comfortable with the concept of independent living. One group of young people felt a lot of young people do not have the emotional skills to live independently. This demonstrates the need for better training to help young people to make the transition to independent living. For example, one participant at the Birmingham event described the shock of getting her first water bill, as she had assumed the ‘water just came from the tap, I had no idea I had to pay for it!’

Practitioners also noted that young people need time to develop the skills to handle the large institutions they may come across in their lives, including, for example, housing departments, benefit agencies and gas and electricity providers:

For all that some young people may come across as shouty and loud, they are in my experience often not very assertive and that shoutiness masks a lack of confidence. But whether they can do that quiet persistent pushing that is required to get the best out of institutions ...

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

Figure 1: Timeline exercise 1

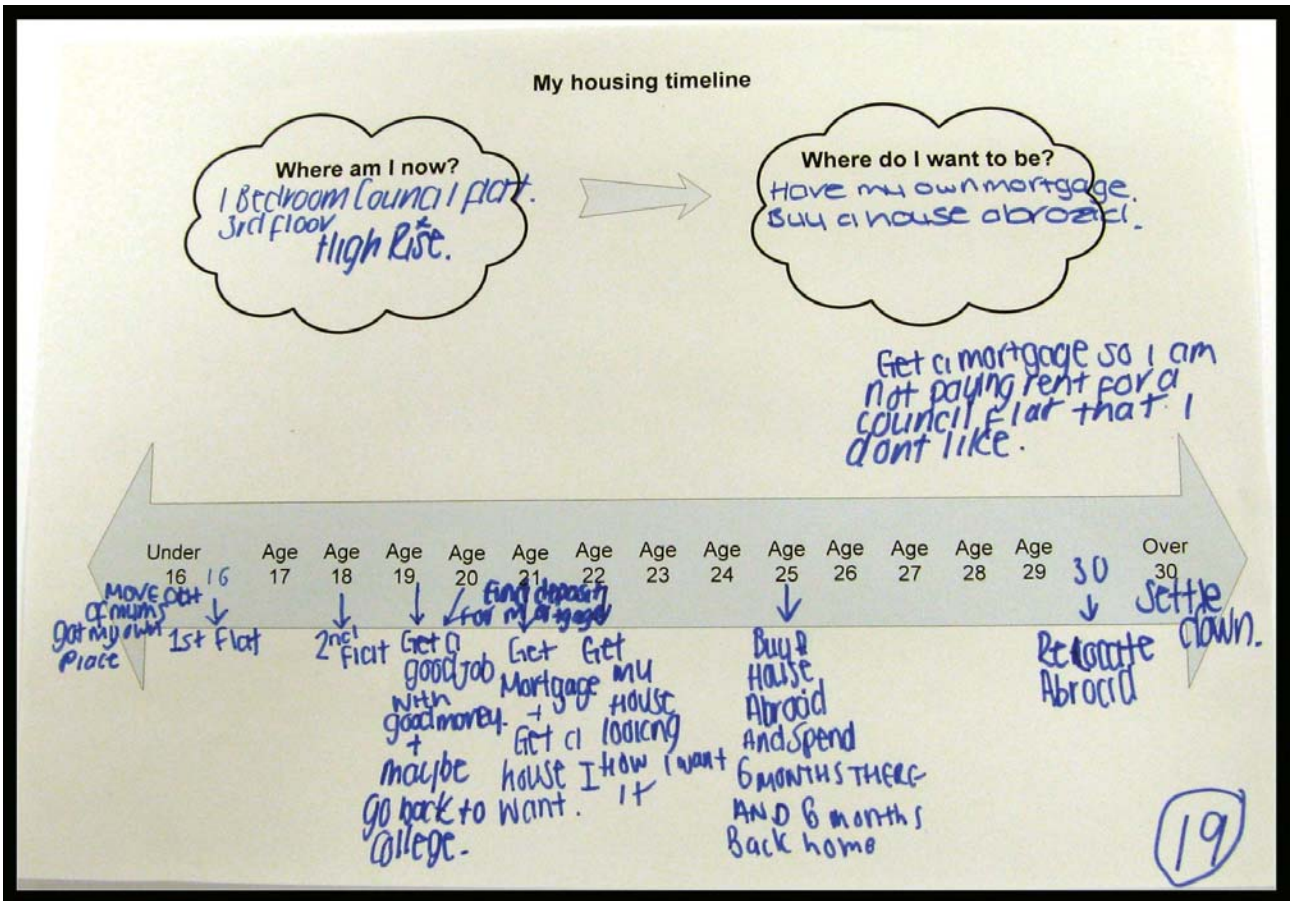
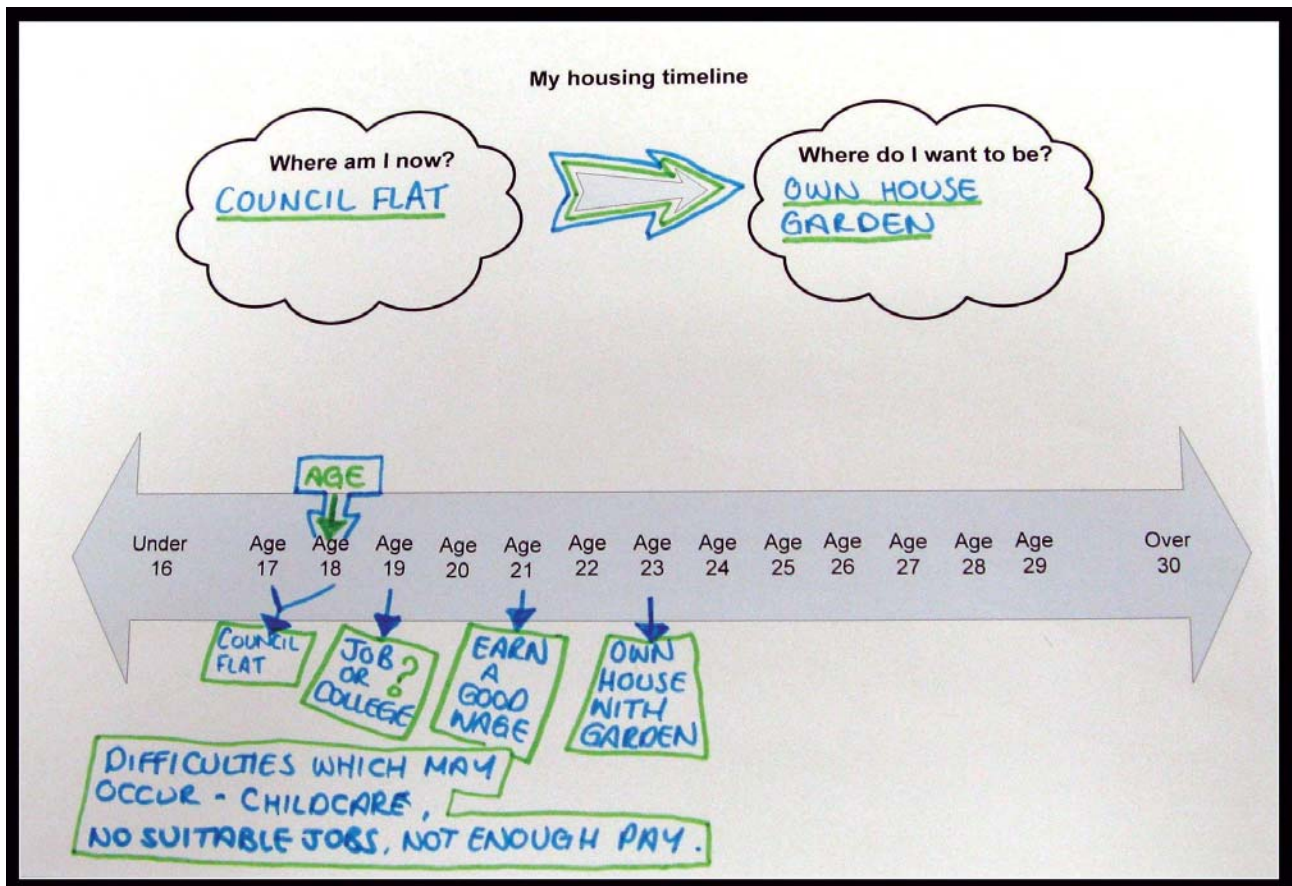


Figure 2: Timeline exercise 2



Some practitioners commented that supporting young people to take on more responsibility for their actions and the consequences of certain behaviour can be a long process. Some young people may find it difficult to make more positive choices and to recognise the longer-term consequences of their actions or inaction.

Barriers to independence

Young people were asked to identify key barriers, important barriers and less important barriers blocking their transition to independent living using a dartboard approach. An example of the dartboard exercise is shown in Figure 3.

Building blocks

Several practitioners highlighted the link between achieving a sustainable housing transition and skills, training, education and employment prospects. One practitioner working with young people who have had a broken educational

background commented that the young people often regret this and wish to 'get back on track'.

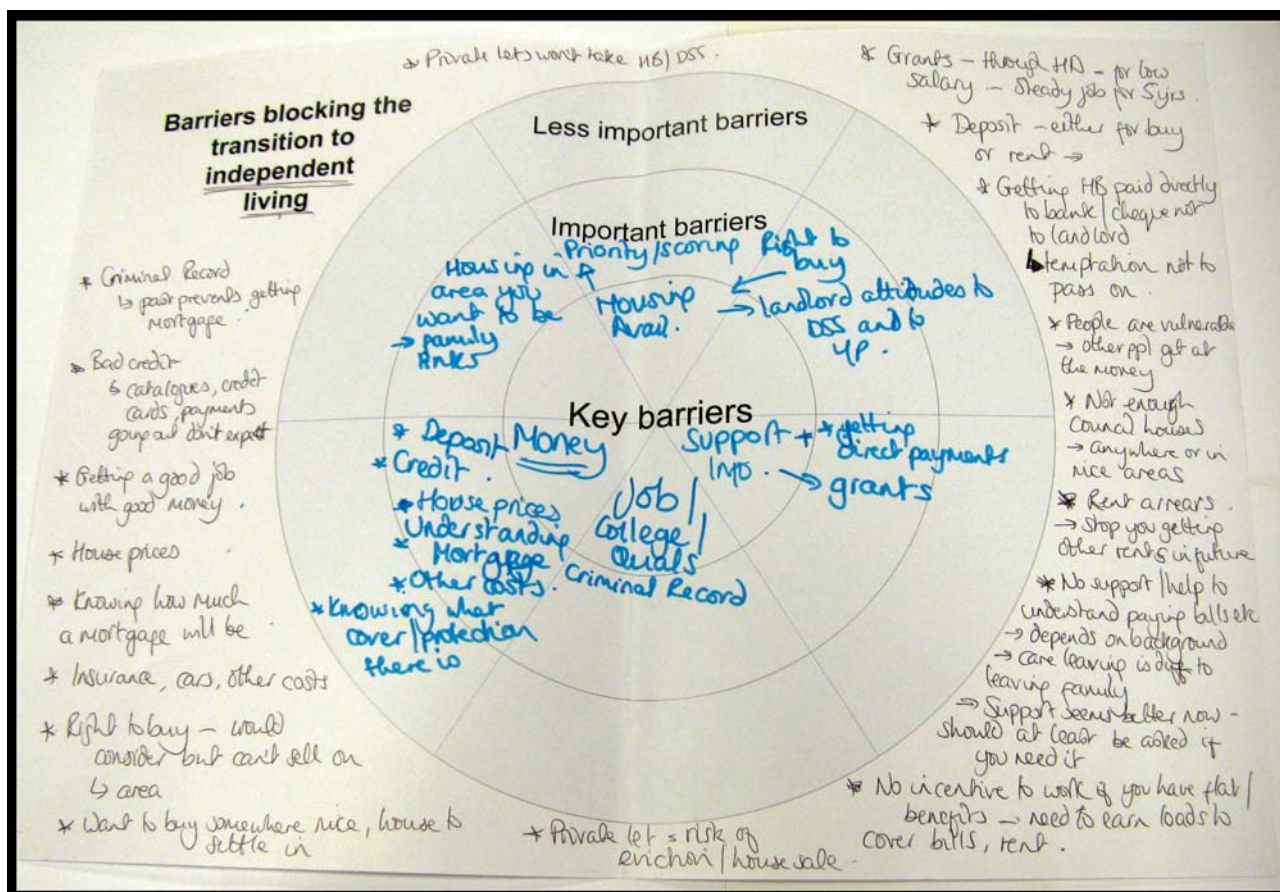
Where we come in is to lift their eyes up a bit and say OK, in ten years where do you want to be and try and show them that their housing future is very much linked to their educational and employment future. On the whole if you get on well at college etc. then you will very likely have an easier housing future. Before it was back to front with everyone thinking get a house and you'll be OK. So that is the strategy we are trying to work with them on – to get them back into learning and get some skills.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

The group of young people in Birmingham closely associated employment with independent living and had the most developed understanding of the transition process into independent living compared to the other UK conversations with young people.

This was the most ambitious of the UK

Figure 3: Dartboard of barriers



conversations, with several participants at or applying to university, and aiming for professional careers as pilots, surveyors and teachers. These participants were all male and had participated in a foster programme to prepare young people for independent living in the Wirral. The female participants lived in foyers/hostels/supported accommodation and all had clear ideas about the type of employment they aspired to, ranging from IT to youth work. For example, one foyer resident (female, aged 19) wanted to gain college qualifications in Counselling and Health and Social Care, and then work towards her goal of being a youth worker. Another housing association tenant was starting a BTEC National Certificate in Business, to help her access well-paid jobs so she could enjoy life and help out her family in the longer term.

Overall this group was the best informed and most aware of housing issues and considerations, and had a clear understanding of the stages involved in moving into independent living, such as training, employment and saving. All members of the group aspired to having their own house or flat, mainly through home ownership eventually. They recognised too the importance of support networks through this transition. This is discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

The participants in the young people workshops in Belfast and Edinburgh also had a good sense of the importance of having a 'good' job and steady income to enable them to own their own house/flat and keep up with mortgage repayments. Several mentioned saving for a deposit to help them make the transition into home ownership. Many young people aspired to having a steady, long-term home. Many felt strongly there was no point moving somewhere short-term for six months – this was seen as a waste of time.

The young people in Cardiff displayed a more fatalistic view of housing progression than the groups in Belfast, Edinburgh and Birmingham, most being unable to see their way out of their current situation. One group was unable to identify any agencies they might go to, or strategies they might employ, to look at saving options and deposits etc. for private renting or 'getting a place of their own'. Most participants agreed that motivation was a big factor in helping themselves into education or work and that depression or

simply the conditions of living in a hostel were huge barriers to moving forward. It was felt that under these circumstances it was 'just too hard to get out of bed'. They also said that they were too scared to move into employment as it removed the security of benefits covering rent and major bills such as council tax and placed the onus on them to manage their own tenancies and money and not to fall into arrears.

Suggested solutions

An example of the dartboard exercise where young people in the different workshops identified essential solutions, important solutions and less important solutions to making a sustainable transition to independent living is shown in Figure 4.

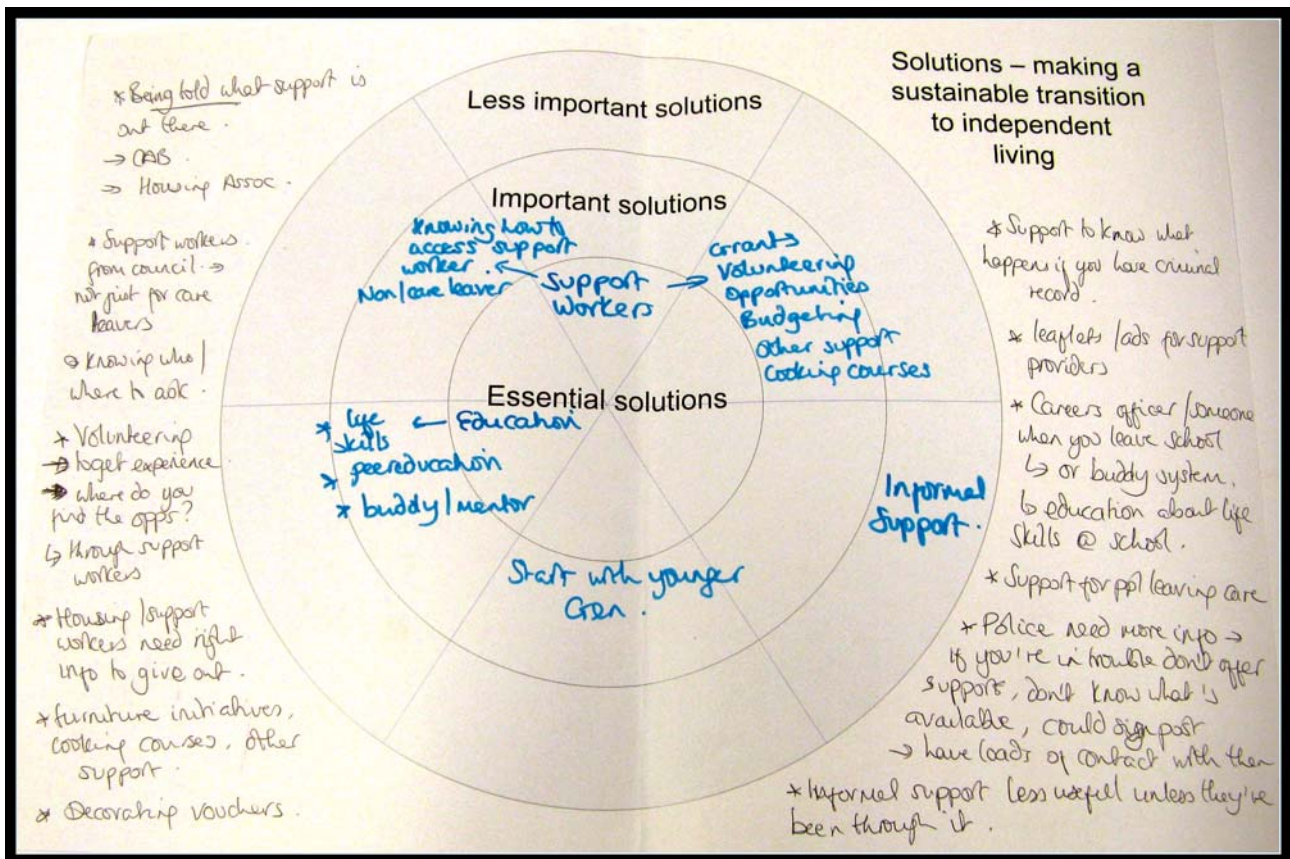
Practitioners believed that young people should be given realistic choices and allowed to make their own decisions. If they are pushed or forced into an option, they are much more likely to disengage quickly and lose their enthusiasm. They felt that being able to participate in the process would raise the aspirations of young people, as well as broaden their horizons, thereby aiding their transition into adulthood. Young people at the event in Birmingham would like to see provision of housing rights and options awareness courses for young people.

Route maps

The workshops between young people and practitioners highlighted that young people are committed to the ideal of finding suitable long-term homes, and most understand the processes involved in making a sustained transition. Young people and practitioners have a common view of viable routes for young people to make the transition from living with their parents to owning their own flat or home. The routes varied but the building blocks needed on the way were understood.

- In Belfast one group agreed that the starting point for the exercise should be living with parents, and the end point owning a flat or house. The group agreed they would rather live on their own than with friends or family.

Figure 4: Dashboard of solutions



- One group in Cardiff had the starting point 'leaving home' and the end point 'to have your own home and to be independent'.
- One group agreed that good information which clearly gave accurate details on young people's options was the first step in helping young people make informed decisions to get 'off the streets'. The information needed to clearly detail how the housing process works. Information should be provided in a format that is easily accessible to homeless people – a DVD circulated at the event was felt to be less accessible to young people already in a homeless situation than leaflets.
- The next step was to provide each homeless young person with a named person to provide 'continuity of support'. This role would be similar to that played by a support worker for young people who have been in care/hostels. It

was seen as essential that this support should not stop at 21 – young people between 21 and 30 often need as much support as younger people to make the transition into independent living from homelessness. It was important to the participants that the named support worker 'knew their background without having to go through it again'. Participants felt this was an important aspect in helping them to move on. There was recognition that for some young people 'it is hard to trust anyone as so many people have let them down'.

- Practitioners and participants agreed it would be useful for a Jobcentre scheme to be established for 'people of no fixed abode'.

Examples of route maps produced at the events are shown in Figures 5 and 6.

Figure 5: Route map 1

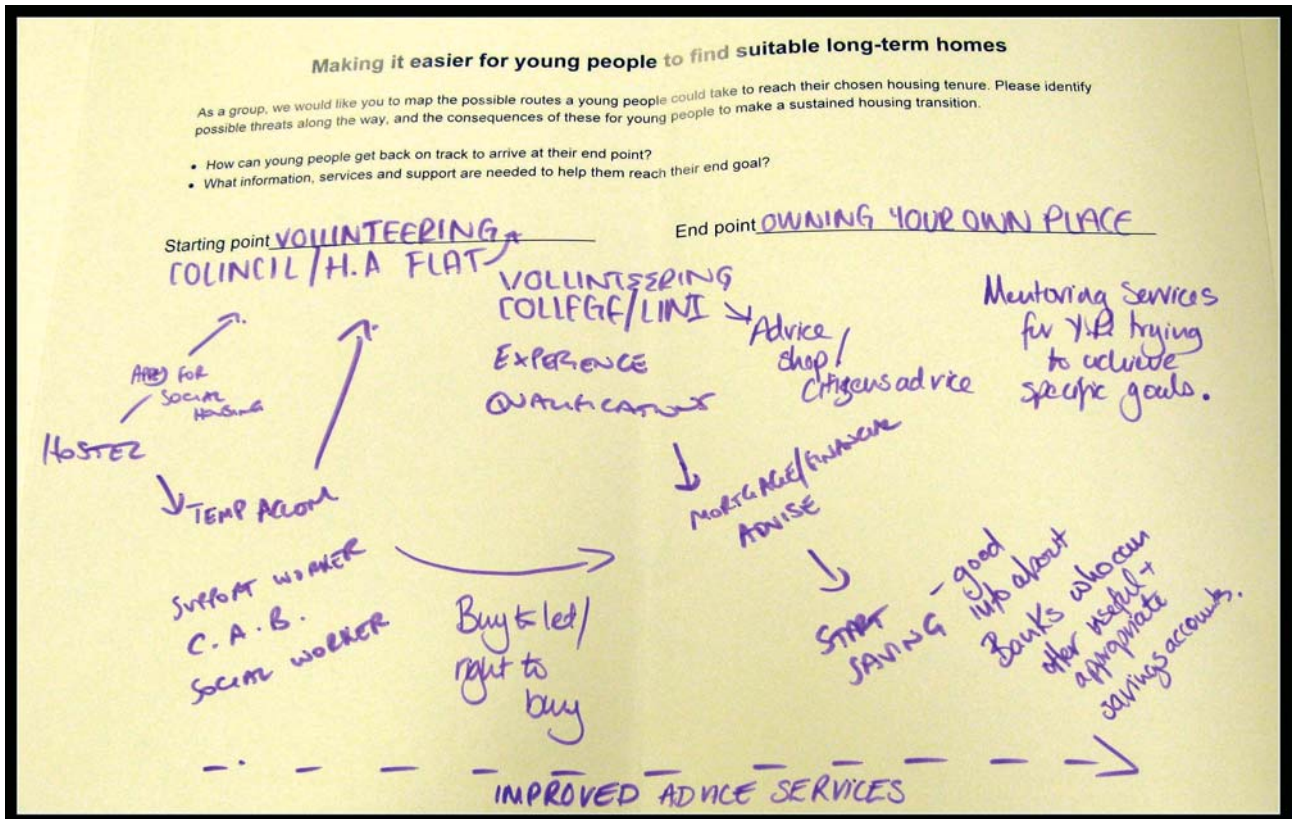
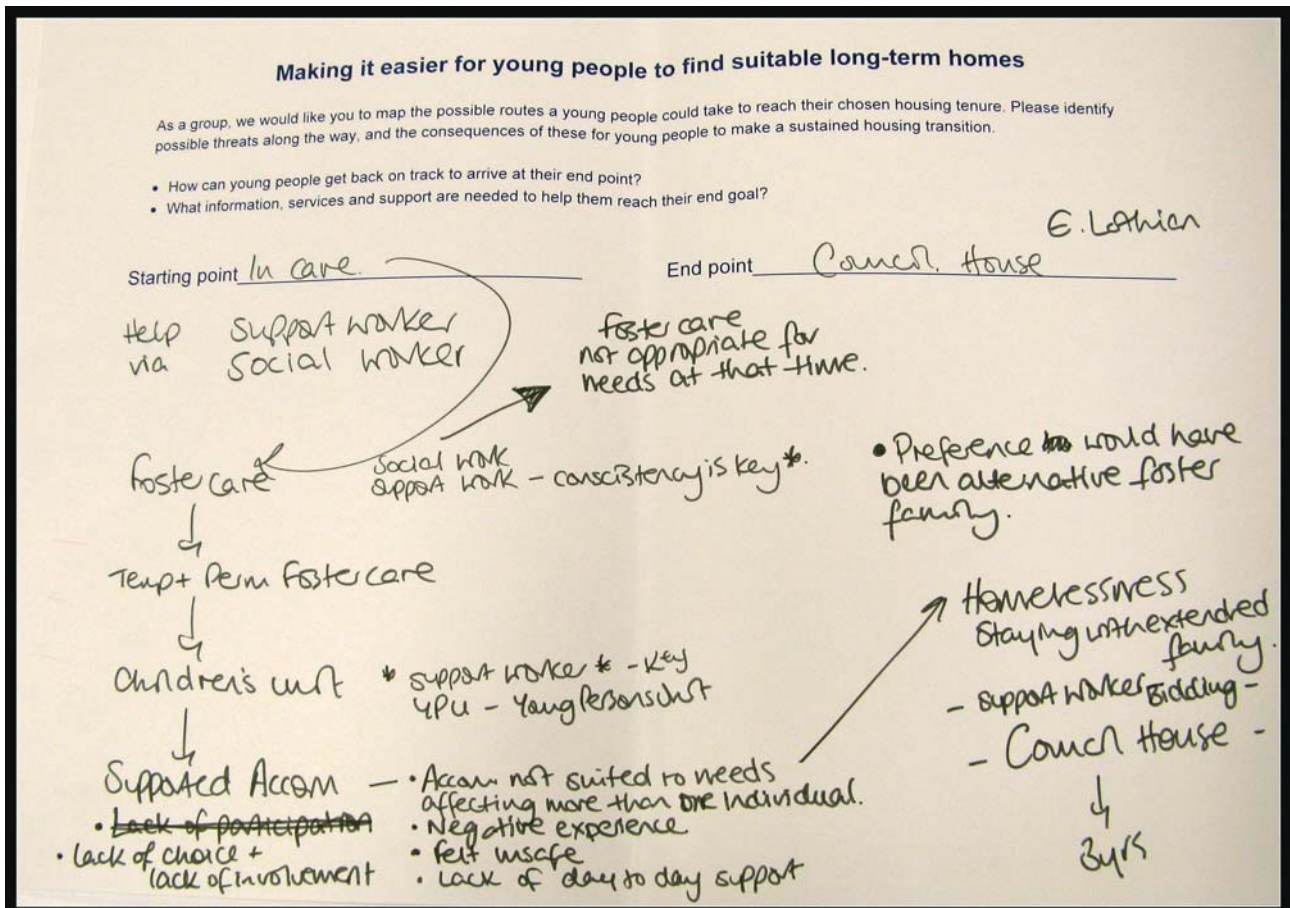


Figure 6: Route map 2



In the box is a poem written by a participant in one of the young persons workshops in Birmingham illustrating the issues he has faced so far in his transition to independent living. His pen name is Da Conscious 1.

He was just 18, thought he knew it all
Decided to leave home and try to stand tall
He had dreams he wanted to become reality
But fell victim to what we call the community
He didn't realise the real world was cold
And the problems faced wasn't foretold

Ended up in a hostel until he signed his
tenancy
Then due to peer pressure and depression
ended up in HMP
He realised he did wrong and wanted to turn
around
So gave up on previous friends he used to
think were sound
Started to look within to find the strength and
discipline
To continue the tradition his family had passed
down to him

He started to use his initiative, learnt from the
past
He adapted to his own opinion at last
Reflective because now he was being assertive
Rather than passive or aggressive

Getting back on track was harder than he
thought
He had family but there was a means to their
support
Probation shrugged him off from the time of his
rebirth
Making him unsure again of his worth

Then he was introduced to the Link
They helped him and reassured him he
wouldn't sink
They helped him in every way that they could
They saw the stereotype but didn't judge like
most normally would

Soon after he was moved into Edmonds Court
He was seen as an individual he was seen as
an equal
He started to progress put his mind to the test
And get involved in things he thought were of
interest
He committed to a course called life skills
And learnt how to prioritise and how to pay his
bills

He was able to adjust, find his creativity
He was able to do what he wasn't initially
Soon after went on the European youth
exchange
Where European countries come together to
put on a play
About the lives lived in a typical day

After that he knew he was on the right track
He decided he wanted to give something back
He decided he wanted to be more involved
And mutual people wanted him to evolve

He attended an interview with the Youth
Advisory Board
Expressing his views, his views were no longer
ignored

The person I am telling you about isn't flawless
But remains to do his best.
His name is Conscious.

(Da Conscious 1)

4 Flexibility in the housing system

Key issues

- The majority of young people participating in the events across the UK viewed home ownership as their ultimate goal, although a range of external factors made that seem unattainable.
- Shared ownership schemes offered a possibility but eligibility criteria prevented many from applying or the schemes were already oversubscribed. Some felt a council or housing association tenancy was a more realistic option as an end goal.
- Practitioners raised the question that if home ownership is no longer a realistic option, maybe society needs to rethink what is perceived in the UK as the 'norm' of home ownership as the 'natural' tenure. Suggestions put forward included more flexibility between tenures with the possibility of two-way migration between tenures.
- In addition, there could be more opportunities for flexibility within social housing. One new initiative between a homelessness organisation in England and a housing association allows the tenant to surrender part of their rent each month as a saving towards a deposit for home ownership.
- Some practitioners questioned the appropriateness of a standard social housing tenancy for life for young people with a view to altering provision to provide more 'portable' products.
- The appeal and accessibility of the private rented sector are limited by high rents, lack of security and the physical condition of some lets. Practitioners felt that to increase the

appeal of the private rented sector would need greater value placed on it by Government and local authorities, which would have implications for Housing Benefit and housing renewal policy.

The previous chapter has shown that housing careers are rarely linear, with various influences operating at different times. Practitioners working with young people view the transition to sustainable independent living as a process which arguably therefore requires flexibility within the housing system.

The study looked at the appeal of different tenures to young people. These could vary between long- and short-term goals.

Strong preference for home ownership

At the workshops with young people in Edinburgh, Belfast and Birmingham, the majority of young people viewed home ownership as their ultimate goal, with a long-term aim of owning their own house with a mortgage. In Belfast, home ownership was seen as preferable to renting, the group voicing a strong feeling of having achieved something by owning their own property. At the event in Birmingham, employment was closely tied in with the group's overall goals, and several specified 'a decent job' as part of where they wanted to be.

Home ownership did not seem attainable for all, so some identified social housing (council tenure) as their end goal. At the Cardiff workshop, the groups felt further away from home ownership and felt a council tenancy was a more realistic goal.

One practitioner working with young homeless people was asked what she considered young people's housing aspirations to be. She commented:

On the whole fairly low housing aspirations – see themselves staying in the social rented sector. For us that is a fairly low aspiration. For some young people at times in their life that is a fine aspiration – it is a short-term one. We think they need to get themselves in a situation where they can make a choice and see that there are different options.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Affordability was identified as a key barrier to home ownership across the UK. One participant (aged 22) in the Edinburgh workshop felt an income of £25,000 would provide a realistic income to be able to support home ownership. He felt this would make home-buying achievable by the age of 28. The participant was about to start an Access to University course and wanted to study Psychology or Philosophy at university following this, gaining employment around the age of 26 or 27. Practitioners though felt that even young people with fairly high-status jobs would be likely to need family money for home ownership, which was unwelcome: 'It feels negative to have to go begging to mum and dad'.

The young people workshop in Belfast felt that the dramatic increase in house prices over the past few years, coupled with a low-wage economy, meant home ownership seemed a distant or unobtainable reality for many young people. One reason for the rise in house prices is the increasing number of people from Eire buying in Belfast and the border areas since the end of 'the Troubles'. The only graduate in the group was aged 25, and described how both he and his girlfriend had master's degrees, worked in call centres and earned £14,000 and £16,000 respectively. They are currently renting and trying to save for a deposit but this is made very difficult by low salaries and by rental costs being so high. The group reflected on the lack of well-paid jobs in Northern Ireland.

In Cardiff, a similar steep increase in house prices in recent years was seen as making home ownership impossible for young people now: 'Going back seven or eight years ago you could buy a cheap house, but they are just not cheap enough now'. In some rural areas housing was said to be cheaper and more affordable but the group felt that although a proportion of

young people could maybe afford the mortgage payments on a property, they would not have the money for a deposit.

Some of the comments on the blog illustrate other views on home ownership:

Why would a 21 year old want to own a place? That's far too young to be tied down with a mortgage.

I agree with the comment that home ownership is totally overrated. I don't understand why we differ so much from our European neighbours and expect that we should all own a home.

At the same time, other comments on the blog emphasise the importance to young people of living in accommodation which they feel belongs to them and provides them with a sense of security – 'at least we can say it's ours', 'we wanted somewhere that was ours'.

Shared buying was viewed as a new trend across the UK as a response to the high cost of purchasing property. In Belfast one practitioner commented:

I should think the number of people who are not related to each other or even cohabiting has probably risen a lot in the last decade. I think that is one of the key ways in which the number of people who have managed to purchase have managed to, otherwise it would have been impossible – by sharing in different ways.

How successful this form of tenure will be in the longer term remains to be seen and concerns are voiced by one blogger:

Although sharing a house can be fun, I think it is best avoided. When it comes to money matters, the less complicated a situation the better it is. It may be working for people at the moment but that's because it's quite a new thing. A few years down the line I can see things getting messy if house prices fall sharply and so on, or one person loses a job, wants to sell at an uncertain time. Buying your home has certain dreams and aspirations attached to it and one of those dreams and aspirations isn't to share your house with a virtual stranger.

In Edinburgh, reference was made by a practitioner to home ownership as the ‘voodoo property ladder’ exerting a powerful influence. Discussion continued on perhaps the need to rethink this aspiration – has society set home ownership up as a goal, yet achieving it may no longer be realistic? There may be a preference for home ownership in the long term but currently this seems unattainable, and if this is seen as an end goal of a long-term strategy, what happens in the meantime?

Frustration was voiced by some young people and some younger practitioners who, in their mid to late twenties, wanted to be in a position to purchase property. They felt they had worked hard with their education, training and efforts in securing good jobs (i.e. the building blocks traditionally associated with the steps to home ownership) yet sole owner-occupation was unachievable for them given current house prices.

The role of intermediate tenures was discussed at all the events. Several participants in the Edinburgh and Cardiff young people workshops were aware of shared ownership options. One participant in Edinburgh was aware of the Homestake Scheme and would consider this, as she currently earned between £14,000 and £15,000, but knew there was limited eligibility. In Belfast the equivalent Co-ownership Scheme for this year was oversubscribed and had to close applications.

Participants agreed that this would be a good stepping stone towards owning their own property if it were available, although one participant raised concerns as he knew a friend who had joined the shared ownership scheme in the past and had reportedly been paying more for the part they rented than for the mortgage part.

One academic researcher in England commented that the low-cost home ownership sector is proving attractive to young single women and this may be because of issues around safety.

In Cardiff, practitioners spoke of the role of Community Land Trusts in providing affordable home ownership options.

Social renting issues

A lack of supply in social rented accommodation was a key concern for young people and practitioners across the UK.

The young people we see still have a perception that it is quite easy to get social housing because the parents have been through that situation and think it is the same. About five to ten years ago young people could be offered a hard to let property but they are very much in short supply now and only going to homeless people.

(Practitioner, Cardiff)

Homelessness was often felt to be the only route into social housing. Some young people in Edinburgh, Belfast and Birmingham linked the lack of supply of social housing to perceived increases in immigration and made the assumption that newly arriving immigrants were being housed before local single people without dependants. This suggests a greater need for information on social housing allocations in order to address such perceptions.

The quality and location of social housing offered to young people were viewed by both young people and practitioners as often inappropriate. Several participants spoke of being uncomfortable living in blocks with substance misusers, drug addicts etc. One practitioner at the Birmingham event said:

You bring people from custody and put them in tower blocks with high drug problems, high crime rates. You're not supporting that young person to move from that style of crime and to become a valued citizen.

In Cardiff, there are availability issues particularly with council housing. Often young people will end up living in areas where they do not wish to be and are concerned that they are being ‘set up to fail’. One young woman had already refused several places from Birmingham council as it was so far from family, in ‘such bad areas’, and she was concerned about other residents.

There was also concern about racial segregation among the Birmingham young people. They felt this had a real, negative impact on how council housing is allocated and felt that the situation is worse in Birmingham because it is so ethnically diverse.

Several young people across the UK felt the social housing allocation system did not give

enough priority to young people. At the Belfast event, one participant currently living in the Foyer had only been able to move on in the past into social housing because entering the Foyer had allocated him 50 points immediately. He had then been awarded 20 points several times for the length of stay. In total the participant had 90 points and so has a chance of securing social housing in the future. The group felt that entering foyer/ housing association/hostel-type provision was the only way for single young men to accrue sufficient points to be allocated social housing.

A practitioner in Edinburgh felt the choice-based letting schemes are a misnomer as they are still based on points and restrictions.

The fact that different systems of applying for social housing operated across the UK was commented upon, with some areas requiring young people to apply to separate housing lists, one for the council and one for housing associations (Birmingham) whereas Wirral operated a unified waiting list. There was a call for more unity and clarity in the process.

Practitioners at the Birmingham event referred to the Tenancy Priority Scheme initiative in Merseyside. This scheme fast-tracks social housing applications from young people who, despite facing a range of difficult issues in their lives, have displayed positive progress.

The lack of flexibility in a social tenancy was referred to by practitioners in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Birmingham. Once allocated a social tenancy, practitioners felt there was little opportunity for young people to move around despite mutual exchange schemes: at present, if they are given a tenancy it is usually theirs for life. The late teenage years and early twenties can be seen as a time of changes and transitions affecting young people physically, socially and for some geographically. Some practitioners questioned the appropriateness of a standard social housing tenancy for life for young people, with a view to altering provision to provide more 'portable' products. However, some young people in the events expressed a commitment to the area they were currently living in, particularly the group in Belfast.

In Edinburgh, practitioners also commented on the lack of provision for an aspirational 'move to a better' social tenancy.

There is a weird irony that if you are in social housing, you can't move into a private tenancy or owner-occupation. I think it is a big issue.

Another practitioner in Edinburgh noted:

Once allocated a social tenancy, there is no provision for an aspirational 'move to a better' social tenancy. This would need to be addressed in future allocations policies.

Views on private renting

Participants described an increase in the role of the private rented sector for young people, particularly for those in their mid twenties. However, they were unsure how far this reflected an active choice by young people or a reaction to the barriers they faced in accessing other options such as owner-occupation and social housing. Other practitioners, however, felt that private renting offered the appeal of flexibility, job mobility and choice of location.

Comments on the blog reflected these concerns:

To me buying is an investment and if circumstances permit then it is always the better option ... I have rented in the past and resented paying 'dead money' but the benefit of being able to give up that responsibility when I wanted to travel was far easier than paying a mortgage or renting out and worrying about rent and tenancy problems whilst on the other side of the world.

I would like to own my own house but at the moment I like to live with other people more, so renting privately works well.

I have been on a housing list for eleven months and have recently found out it could take up to 33 months ... I am considering a private landlord just to see we have our own home.

I currently rent a flat from a private landlord with my boyfriend. It is frustrating because the rent is high but the space is still small and we can't make the changes we want.

At the Cardiff event, practitioners commented on the lack of availability of private rented sector accommodation for young people in parts of Wales, particularly its impact in rural areas.

In the Glamorgan area, Barry and Penarth are the two main towns but if you are a young person who has lived in Western Vale then the private rented sector is five-bed luxury accommodation. That is a very big issue in rural areas – having to move from their support networks to where the accommodation is available. Moving away from support networks will have an impact on their ability to maintain and sustain that accommodation and how comfortable they feel living there.

Young people and practitioners at all the events considered that the appeal and accessibility of the private rented sector are limited by high rents, lack of security and the physical condition of some lets. Accessing private renting was seen as difficult for young people because credit ratings are unachievable if a young person has moved from hostel to hostel, and young people on low incomes were unable to save for deposits. In Belfast, one practitioner said the high cost of private renting has led to overcrowding ‘just so that there is enough money to pay the rent’.

The Single Room Rent restriction for young people under the age of 25 was a key issue at all the events. The Single Room Rent level for under-25s for Housing Benefit was questioned by many young people and practitioners who pointed out that electricity, gas and food bills are not reduced because a person is under 25.

Practitioners at the Belfast event felt that high rents and the low-wage economy can be seen to act as a disincentive to young people to move out of benefit dependency, as wages would not match benefit levels. This can lead to a sense of despair, hopelessness and lack of motivation which may result in a negative lifestyle as young people are caught in a poverty cycle. Reference was made to a rental system operating in Dublin some time ago where the social housing rent was a percentage of the tenant’s salary rather than a set rate based on floor space. At that time it was 8 per cent and was seen as an incentive to earn.

Practitioners at the Birmingham and Cardiff events expressed concerns about the impact of lack of Housing Benefit for young people in full-time education as they are forced to work to pay the rent, and called for amendments to the benefits system.

Practitioners at the event in Birmingham commented that lower-priced accommodation is often of a poor standard. Practitioners felt most social sector providers offered a high standard of temporary accommodation which a young person becomes used to and expects to find when they move on.

The reality of achieving that with the benefits they are on is unrealistic.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Participants felt landlords often view young people as high-risk tenants. An example of a new initiative aimed at removing these barriers was a scheme, Calon Lettings, set up by a housing association in Wales which rented from private landlords and then sublet to young people. The housing is provided to individuals identified by the council as most in need. The scheme links into support services, provides a six-month warning to tenants if they have to leave and helps with locating new accommodation. Rents are within Housing Benefit levels. The private landlords also still have some guarantee that the property will not be damaged, or that they will be reimbursed if this happens.

Practitioners felt that to increase the appeal of the private rented sector, Government and local authorities would need to make it more affordable and of a decent standard. This would have implications for Housing Benefit and housing renewal policy.

In private rented it relies on very strong partnerships on the ground between voluntary sector and local authorities. Most of it is about the deposit and rent in advance and how you can persuade landlords to take young people who may be seen as more risky tenants. Lots of barriers with the private rented sector if you are under 25 with the Single Room Rent. The private sector is probably OK if you are a young family and you want choice about where

you want to live, but it is not the solution for everybody at the moment, not the way it is structured.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Practitioners and young people referred to good-practice initiatives to assist with the deposit for young people, for example Smartmove, and that some accredited landlords provide information packs for new tenants.

Flexibility between tenures

The conversations with young people at all the events illustrate that the transition to independent living is a process which may involve many different types of housing situations. This is shown through the timeline exercises highlighting where a young person is living now, their previous accommodation history and their aspirations for future housing, as well as in the route maps discussed in joint workshops with practitioners. Housing careers are not necessarily linear and this suggests there should be more flexibility within the system to allow for movement between tenures and types of housing.

One practitioner working with homeless young people in Cardiff commented:

We all have a responsibility to promote the private rented sector and different ways of using different accommodation. We should let young people move around in different accommodation. When I think about my youth, I moved around and shared with different friends. Whereas for our client group if they get a social rent, that is theirs for life if they maintain it, and how many young people want that? If they don't want that they end up losing their tenancy because they don't know how to move to something else. So I think we need to have more flexible housing options.

Practitioners raised the question that if home ownership is no longer a realistic option, maybe society needs to rethink what is perceived in the UK as the 'norm' of home ownership as the 'natural' tenure. Suggestions put forward included more flexibility between tenures with the possibility

of two-way migration between tenures. For example, staircasing options, such as those within shared ownership, would allow a person's housing situation to deal more effectively with changes in income and family circumstances. A practitioner in Cardiff referred to a scheme offering flexible tenure options currently being provided by Hafod Housing Association. Another practitioner in Cardiff suggested tenure-neutral housing options.

In addition, there could be more opportunities and flexibility shown by social housing. One new initiative between St Basil's in Birmingham and another housing association allows the tenant to surrender part of their rent each month as a saving towards a deposit for home ownership.

This involves putting young people in the pathway to some home ownership option. At the moment if you are a young person, home ownership is not an option. We started in May 2008 with a housing association, where part of the rent each month is surrendered as a dowry, a saving. The young person should be working, and if they are working they should be saving as well, and hopefully at the end of the three-year period, they will have developed a bit of a nest egg to maybe get on to the home ownership ladder with a small percentage of equity. These are our options to give young people some sort of aspiration so that they don't have to be in social housing for the rest of their lives. There are other ways.

The importance of flexibility within the housing system links into previous research looking at the experiences of young people living in rural areas of Wales.¹ The research showed that housing was not a major consideration in terms of whether to stay or leave.

It tended to be much more about employment, decisions about further and higher education, lifestyle considerations and linking to lifestyle the availability of particular services and facilities in different settlements. You can't look at housing in isolation. It's one of several factors that are behind someone moving in or out of rural areas. Young people left rural areas to broaden their horizons, not making

a decision to leave a rural community forever but trying other things and following a career in an urban context and then moving back when they wanted to start a family or have a young family and then they would think more about quality of life and schooling and environmental issues.

(Academic researcher)

Note

- 1 S. Hartwell et al. (2007) *Population Change in Rural Wales: Social and Cultural Impacts*, Research Report No. 14. Cardiff: Wales Rural Observatory.

5 Preparation for independent living

Key issues

- Many young people are unaware of the services and housing opportunities available to them, as well as feeling ill-prepared for independent living.
- A recurrent theme in all the events was the important role education in schools could play in preparing young people for the reality and difficulty of finding and then sustaining accommodation. The role of peer educators was given as a good-practice example with initiatives mentioned in England and Scotland.
- Independent living skills need to be developed prior to moving into accommodation and go beyond budgeting and cooking skills, to 'managing the door'/peer pressure, getting on with neighbours, communication skills and keeping the house clean.
- Information should be provided in relevant formats. Different formats were considered more appropriate for different types of information.
- In terms of seeking advice, some young people were aware of services available whereas others did not know where to go and said they did not know what to ask for.

Education

Included within the initial telephone interviews with practitioners and also at the events were questions about what helps young people to make a better transition to independent living. Preparation and planning were key messages, with education in schools seen as an important part of the process to prepare young people for the reality and the difficulty of finding accommodation.

They reach 16 and think they will move into a flat and they haven't thought about bills etc. They see it as party land but a lot of the tenancies fail. It is nothing like how they visualised it being, we see a great deal of that.
(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

Practitioners and young people at all the events felt there was insufficient information and advice currently made available and taught in schools to help all young people make the transition to independent living, particularly around financial planning, managing a budget, and setting up and maintaining a home. One practitioner in Cardiff commented: 'Young people are taught maths but not budgeting skills'. Another practitioner in Birmingham felt:

The Government should stop assuming young people know how to access housing and pay bills. Everyone should be 'taught from scratch' about budgeting and independent living.

They felt more information should be available in schools and delivered by peer educators – people who have been through a range of housing experiences and can share these with young people. The Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum could be broadened, and was seen by both practitioners and young people across the UK as a good starting point for educating young people about housing and helping them develop the life skills to make housing decisions and sustainable transitions.

Equipping young people with information and relevant facts of the housing system as early as possible may prevent some young people from making decisions that will contribute to them becoming homeless.
(Practitioner, England)

Some practitioners added a word of caution in the use of games, which can simplify the complexity of housing issues, and the need to be careful not to use stereotypes in scenario-building.

Examples already exist of projects working with schools. St Basil's in Birmingham runs STaMP (Schools Training and Mentoring Project) which provides homelessness awareness sessions for young people in Years 10 and 11 and contributes towards the PSHE and Citizenship curriculum. The project trains young people to become peer educators who co-deliver school sessions. They go into schools in areas where there is a high incidence of homelessness and talk to young people.

The mentoring part of it is that young people who are living in our projects get trained up and go along and talk about it as peers.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Participants in the Edinburgh young people workshop referred to a game that the Move On organisation peer educators use in local schools called 'The Price is Right'. Players are awarded a community care grant and have to allocate amounts to buying essentials, such as a bed, sofa, fridge or freezer. This helps young people learn the value of money and think about the realities of independent living. Move On is a very 'youth-friendly' organisation. The game works well when delivered by peer educators who have been through the real-life experiences themselves and to whom young people can relate. The game helps young people learn about budgeting, such as where they would do their food shopping and how the same items can be bought much cheaper in one particular outlet rather than another.

In Cardiff, Llamau have been providing a Learning 4 Life programme for the past ten years in their education project. This works with young people who have stopped attending school at 13 or 14 and brings together work, training and education with housing.

Advice and information

At the Birmingham workshops, a range of housing information, advice and support services were known to and available for the young people. The

group of young people from the Wirral had access to particularly strong support and advice services through the fostering programme and foyer provision.

At the Edinburgh workshop young people agreed that there was no shortage of housing information, advice and services in Edinburgh, and they felt people who had grown up in the care system and lived in hostels and similar had a far better understanding of how to access these services. Those in the group who had made the transition from living with family to privately renting had a limited understanding of where/how to access housing information, advice and resources. It was also felt that there is far greater support for those aged 16 to 17, but it was also more likely that this age group would be housed in a hostel rather than immediately being allocated social housing. The group also agreed that for those aged over 18 there was less access to support.

In Belfast and Cardiff, however, young people who attended the consultation events were aware of only very limited housing information, advice and support. Overall the groups had a limited understanding of where and how to access housing information, advice and resources. The group in Belfast reported a real lack of housing information and advice services, although they spoke positively of Outspoken, a homelessness service, and the Housing Rights Service. This was reinforced by the timeline exercise:

- The under-20s in particular viewed their parents (either their father or mother) as a key source of housing advice.
- One identified the Jobcentre as a source of advice on housing and employment issues (used at age 18).
- Several participants recognised the need for mortgage advice but had not received any to date.

Practitioners felt it was important for young people to be aware that parents, carers or peers might not give them the right information, as not everyone has access to up-to-date housing information. Accessing accurate information was seen as essential by both young people and practitioners

to reduce the ups and downs in making the transition to independent living, enabling young people to make sustained transitions. Recognising sources of information may not be up to date, one organisation working with young people has prepared a booklet for parents to help them talk with young people about what is involved in leaving home. At the Cardiff workshop, practitioners referred to the No Guarantee project which provided a DVD of information and activities for young people to work through, looking at issues of homelessness and where to go for advice. Practitioners and young people at the Belfast workshop felt advice and information services were more available to people living in supported accommodation, with a lack of advice and information for young people living at home.

Some of the practitioners at the Edinburgh workshop commented that there was a lot of good information around but it was only accessed by a young person 'if in their orbit of interest'. Others felt the format needed to be improved and had done a session with young people which showed they did not want packs to read but would rather see real-life stories and see videos on, for example, YouTube. Other suggestions included provision of a number for young people to ring and someone to speak to. One organisation had worked with young people on their willingness to use helplines and found that while some young people felt their situation was not serious enough to use the helpline, others felt daunted by the task. One practitioner felt a one-stop shop was needed to explain all the housing options to young people. Some advice organisations may be seen by young people as not providing a service for them – the Citizens Advice Bureau was given as an example. It was viewed rather as a service for older people.

The internet was seen as an important, viable alternative to face-to-face support, but is an underdeveloped resource in the housing sector. The participants were not aware of any existing internet sites that focused on housing issues and needs. Young people felt their peers would take up this online service if it existed, and recommended it be advertised via pop-ups or links on other websites targeted at young people. Online support should be seen as an alternative to, not a replacement for, face-to-face advice. Online

services would provide general information to raise young people's awareness of housing options and signpost people to local specialist services to access in-depth support or advice.

Advice lines and websites were identified as useful information sources that protect the young person's anonymity. Telephone advice lines should have a free phone number to ensure they are accessible to all young people.

Practitioners at the Cardiff event would like to see a website for all housing providers and all organisations for young people. The site needs to be 'young people-friendly' and provide central, core information. The Welsh Children and Young People's Partnership is believed to be developing this. One of the practitioners felt that there should be a housing database or source site, where there are links to all the services and information needed to get into independent living. He felt that the current provision is very segregated, which makes it a lot less accessible to young people.

The young people workshop in Edinburgh reflected on the importance of learning the value of money, and concluded that most young people do not think in this way before moving into independent living. Before independent living, the group did not think about where the money came from for food and the electricity meter ('just thought you switched it on!'), TV licence ('didn't realise you had to pay for a TV licence, couldn't believe it!'). They did not understand where the money came from, as 'if you're used to having had it all done for you, you don't think about where the money came from'. Young people, at the age of 16, do not budget with their money, and are 'more concerned with having a good time'. Learning about budgeting and understanding the value of money is important as it 'makes you appreciate houses a lot more than before'. Young people need training on the banking system, to help them understand their payment options, such as how to set up direct debits rather than relying on cheques.

Independent living skills need to be developed prior to moving into accommodation and go beyond budgeting and cooking skills. Young people said they would like to see awareness courses for young people, informing them of their housing rights and options. Young people said they would like:

- information on how to be prepared for moving into their own home;
- information to help them work out what housing they can afford;
- information on the practicalities of setting up home and maintaining a home – furniture, food, decorating etc.

Practitioners spoke of the need to teach independent living skills such as ‘managing the door’/peer pressure, getting on with neighbours, communication skills and keeping the house clean. Young people said they often ‘don’t know what to ask for’, and the groups felt awareness needed to be increased to enable young people to ask the ‘right’ questions. Young people at the Birmingham

event said fear is a key barrier in making the transition to independent living. Many young people are ‘scared of the outside, they have never been on their own, there has always been people around’, such as in hostels. Living on their own can therefore be very daunting for a young person and needs planning and preparation so that young people are able to cope and are not back in a hostel twelve months later.

One of the young people groups in Edinburgh discussed who young people turn to in the first instance for housing information and advice. The police, doctors’ surgeries, nurses and truancy officers were all identified as key workers that young people may be in contact with in crisis situations, and so should be kept well informed so they are able to effectively refer young people on to specialist housing support and advice services.

6 Supporting young people through transition

Key issues

- The existence of a support network is seen as vital in aiding transition to independent living: 'It's about having someone there'.
- Many different examples of informal and formal support networks were mentioned at the events, including buddying, mentors, 'aunties' in student accommodation, lodging schemes, family, peer support and support workers.
- Some young people felt all young people should have access to support workers, including those moving out of the family home. This raises the question of whether there should be an extension of the Connexions Service for young people aged over 19 to provide support as and when needed.

Each event will throw up new challenges for a young person and only over time will they learn and develop the skills needed to maintain this process. The transition into independent living is ongoing for most young people depending on their individual circumstances, having available and consistent support available to them can significantly increase their longer-term objectives.

(Practitioner, England)

Practitioners and young people spoke of the importance of 'having someone there', of some sort of support network to fall back on when needed, to provide emotional and practical support and aid the transition to independent living. Most young people may have family support – 'and if it doesn't work out can go back home and get a tenner if short of money, or help with the washing' (Practitioner, Cardiff) – but if this is not available, other forms of support are needed.

What young people say is that they tell a story about an individual support worker, someone they did training with or at work, so who got them and listened to them and helped them turn it around. This is the story I hear most often from young people about what made a difference. It is about having someone there, that they can trust, and if things don't work out they can go to. If haven't got a family to do that then it needs to be someone else. Whole range of different models and ways of doing this but I don't think anyone can say there is one model better than another.

(Practitioner, Edinburgh)

Various models were mentioned in the study, including buddying, mentors, 'aunties' in student accommodation, lodging schemes, family, peer support and support workers, as well as the importance of mediation services and early intervention to help reduce the number of young people leaving home in an unplanned way.

Some young people in the groups who had left care spoke of the 'throughcare worker' they were assigned. One participant described this person as a 'lifesaver' and the only reason she had been able to sustain the transition into independent living, as the worker was consistent in her support and non-judgemental. She could call the worker when she had concerns, to let off steam and discuss how to resolve issues. At first they were in contact three times a week, now it is once a month. The worker will help with benefit forms and bills. 'Just having someone to listen helps.' The group felt strongly that all young people should have access to support workers, as they are not currently available to young people moving directly out of the family home.

High-level support at the beginning of a tenancy, combined with flexibility by some landlords, was seen as crucial to providing the young person with a firm foundation to maintain

their tenancy. If a young person does not have family or friends to assist with the process, support workers should be available.

If we spend two weeks at the beginning helping someone with something they need like a Community Care Grant, it may make all the difference to the success of the tenancy. This is a problem with Registered Social Landlord [RSL] and local authority tenancies who want a young person to move in straightaway and yet they can't apply for the Community Care Grant until they have the address. The electric may not be switched on either. They are so keen to keep their voids low but we need more flexibility. I think RSLs and LAs need to think more flexibly about what is impacting on that young individual and be more realistic. If I was moving and I was told I had to move tomorrow – how difficult would that be! I think we have young people who are in crisis and have support needs and we ask them to jump through hoops that most of us who don't have the level of needs that they have, wouldn't be able to do.

(Practitioner, Cardiff)

Support workers were seen as a vital and effective support mechanism for young people, providing advice on 'every angle' of housing. Support workers consistently 'took the time to give young people the information to help them move on'. Two of the participants (male aged 19 and female aged 18) had a support worker. Both viewed the support worker as 'brilliant' and an invaluable source of support and advice. The male was living in his own flat but was still in touch with his support worker two to three times a week. Both support workers focused on money management, budgeting and paying bills. This support was seen as essential in making the transition into independent living. However, several of the group (aged 21 and 23) were critical of support workers who were younger than them and had not been through the same experiences. The group felt it was essential that the support worker role was performed by people who have been homeless or lived in hostels and supported housing themselves. This supports the peer educator approach that was described as

working well in the event held in Scotland. The concern about improving support worker training also concurs with findings from the Scottish group.

Some young people at the Edinburgh event and some practitioners in Cardiff spoke of their concern at the lack of continuity in the support provided to young people trying to access housing, particularly with regard to care leavers. They also felt the support was not tailored enough to individual needs and that many young people require support for longer than is provided. One of the practitioners, who had experienced youth homelessness himself, felt that support is provided for short bursts of time and often by a multitude of different support workers. He felt that young people who are in a vulnerable position need to be able to build a rapport with support workers over time in order to gain benefits from the provision.

Young people and practitioners at the Birmingham event felt the foster care supported living programme in the Wirral demonstrated good practice in successfully grounding young people from chaotic backgrounds and helping them prepare for and sustain independent living. All four participants from the supported living programme viewed the scheme very positively. The scheme is for young people aged 16 to 18 who live with a family. One of the participants had already made a successful transition into independent living and described his flat as providing 'so much freedom'. The participant likes the sense of responsibility of having his own place, and yet knows he can call on the support worker if he needs support or advice. The other three participants were currently preparing to make the transition.

The 'foster' Mum was often described as just 'like a Mum, I do favours for her like gardening, and she helps me with painting and decorating for the flat'. The foster parent helps the young person complete a support plan, including how to claim benefits, how to budget or how to cook. Once they have completed all the tasks the support plan is signed off by the foster parent. However, support does not stop once the young person leaves the foster home, one participant describing how their foster parent is 'always there ... it has been ideal, she has taught me everything I need to know'. The participant felt this was essential in enabling young people to sustain the transition into

independent living. The participant who has moved into his own flat is also supported by a social worker and council housing officer.

Participants from foyers in both Birmingham and the Wirral felt these offered a positive step into independent living by providing 'semi-independent housing', with each resident having a studio flat with their own shower and kitchen. These participants emphasised the essential role of their support worker, such as helping them complete Housing Benefit forms. The support workers offer up to six hours of support a week. Support workers helped the residents to budget, as they 'didn't know what to buy', and helped them look for work. The support workers offered very practical assistance, taking the residents shopping and helping them to read the food labels. To access this support, each young person has to be in education, training or working. At one foyer there are ten floating support workers, but each resident is assigned one support worker who is their first point of call. Floating support officers are based in the head office. One participant referred to the 'energy' of the support worker team: 'doing lots of mad stuff ... running clubs'. They also provide food and nutrition advice. There is also a harm reduction worker based in the head office.

The good-practice initiatives of St Basil's were praised by the group. These initiatives included the Service Level Agreement set up with Birmingham City Council regarding youth homelessness, the checklist of 13 essential items required before a young person can be considered for move-on accommodation, the planned action route, the 'float and support' approach where young people are reassessed every three months to see if they are still in need of support, and the twelve-week exit strategy making it very difficult for young people to disappear or drop out of the service. In addition St Basil's has a housing scheme for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) young people.

There is a young persons' team scheme run by Midland Heart Housing Group in the Sandwell area, which provides furnished accommodation for young people and provides support for up to two years. The city council has an agreement with the group, including the condition that they provide accommodation for the scheme which the young people are allowed to keep even after the

support has ended. Midland Heart runs a Multiple Needs team which works with young people who would not be able to manage in a communal living environment. Therefore they are accommodated in their own tenancy with a lot of intensive support. The team members are specialised in different areas in order to effectively support young people with mental health issues, drug problems, criminal tendencies and the like. In addition, Midland Heart has an Early Intervention Service in Sandwell. This provides three bed spaces for young people in crisis, and is often used by people who are in need of some form of respite from their current housing situation.

An 'auntie' system is used within Aston University, where older students support the new students and help them settle into their new accommodation and situation. The practitioners felt that a similar system could be used with young people making the transition into independent living, where someone who had experienced the process could act as a support pillar. Furthermore, it was believed that there should be more peer-to-peer work and research.

Some practitioners and young people commented that young people need to have the right kind of support which encourages them to be independent and proactive and not inadvertently promote reliance and dependency.

It's about having the right people supporting the young people. Often people have good intentions, but they are merely 'over supporting' them which just isn't suitable.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Support programmes could be designed on the supported living model, as this gives 'young people tasks to do every fortnight, so they are in control of their transition to independent living'. The tasks are recorded in a 'Homemaker file', such as how to pay gas and water bills, how to pay council tax and how to fix appliances. The Homemaker file provides a clear structure for young people to refer back to. The budget plans empower young people by helping them record the necessary information to include in Community Care Grant applications, and demonstrate to future landlords and others that they can stick to a budget.

Some of the young people at the Birmingham and Edinburgh events felt there should be more support workers to support more young people making the transition to independent living. Support workers should be available for all young people, including those leaving the family home. This raises the question of whether there should be an extension of the Connexions Service to young people aged over 19 to provide support as and when needed.

7 Ideas for the future

This section looks at the most important issues for young people's housing highlighted by participants at each of the workshops, with their preferences for change, followed by ideas for the future raised by the study as a whole.

Key issues for Edinburgh workshop

When practitioners and young people were asked what they thought was the most important issue for young people's housing today, their responses referred to the lack of options for young people, with not enough independent accommodation across all tenures, the need for support and the need to ensure young people have access to relevant information in relevant formats. In addition, the 'position of young people in society' was seen as important, with practitioners commenting on how trust needs to be invested in young people: they need to be part of a community and able to participate in it.

If they were prime minister and in a position to make changes, the young people and practitioners, generally mirroring the above, would focus on provision of more affordable homes, more information and support, listening to young people, providing longer-term funding to voluntary organisations who provide services to young people, and granting Scotland independence.

Key issues for Belfast workshop

The priorities for young people and practitioners at the Belfast workshop were increased supply of housing, particularly more social housing as waiting lists were seen as too long, and regeneration of areas of derelict housing through building new homes. Affordability was a key issue in all tenures, as well as advice and support to young people.

Changes they would make if they were prime minister were to build more houses for social

needs, cap rents and house prices, and extend Housing Benefit for a period of time after young people start work/training or education.

Key issues for Cardiff workshop

Participants at the Cardiff workshops felt the most important housing issues for young people were the lack of affordable properties, the time on waiting lists for social housing, 'too many young parents looking for housing', the need for cleaner and safer hostels, and the lack of accommodation available for young men. Education, information and support were also important.

Changes they would like to make if they were prime minister focused mainly on the provision of more properties, including more supported hostels, more social housing and amendments to the regulations for social housing providers to invest. New housing would be environmentally friendly, housing would be of a decent standard, there would be more information for young people on housing issues and one practitioner would like to see ministers facing the real issue of 'not having a home'.

Key issues for Birmingham workshop

The young people and practitioners at the Birmingham workshop identified lack of affordable housing, limited availability of independent housing for young people and lack of priority consideration for young people in social housing allocation as some of the most important housing issues facing young people today. In addition, stereotyping, discrimination, racism and segregation were seen as important issues, with one young person saying 'make it easier for us to advance in life'. The prevention of homelessness and the role of family and relationships, as well as money, jobs and qualifications and the suggestion that 'MPs should

live like me for a year to see how hard it is', were also identified as key issues and initiatives.

If they were prime minister and in a position to make changes, the young people and practitioners would build more housing, provide 'more accommodation for 16 to 25 year olds', provide more schemes for homeless people and provide a category for young people in the social housing points system. In addition, the responses included 'tougher immigration laws', 'reduce poor and rich divide' and 'give all homeless people housing'.

Ideas for the future

Young people and practitioners proposed a wide range of solutions to different aspects of the problems facing young people wanting to make sustainable housing transitions. The diversity of solutions are as much concerns for the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and local education services as they are for Communities and Local Government and housing organisations.

The solutions proposed can relate to general needs of all young people (e.g. budgeting and financial capability training in schools) or more specific support needs depending on individual circumstances.

Raise profile of young people

A key issue affecting young people's transition to sustainable independent living that was raised by young people and practitioners at all the events was the view that young people are often misrepresented and negatively stereotyped, which can minimise the opportunities provided to them. They wanted to be listened to and involved in decision-making processes and for services to be tailored to individual needs. There was a call for society to place greater value on young people.

Organisations that deal with young people should be more adept at working with young people, for example by having staff trained in working with this age group.

A strong message from young people and practitioners was that the Single Room Rent impacts negatively on young people's housing transitions. One practitioner would like to see some research on the impact some specific laws have on young people and their housing

transitions: for example, on the impact of the Single Room Rent and the effect of lower benefit levels for younger people.

Quality youth housing provision

As well as practitioners and young people wanting to see the provision of a greater supply of affordable housing for young people on low incomes and the regeneration of derelict homes and land (particularly in Belfast), there was a call for quality youth housing provision with more specialist youth-oriented housing projects. The view was expressed that there is limited independent housing for young people and any accommodation offered to young people should be in good condition. There is currently insufficient housing for different groups, for example to ensure non-drug users are housed separately from drug users.

The practitioners at the Birmingham event felt that the accommodation for young people should be more dispersed and with high levels of credible support that is tailored and suited to them. It was perceived that the local authorities and council are disengaged from the reality of young people trying to access housing: there is a generic lack of knowledge about the needs of young people and this should be remedied. The changing needs of young people need to be addressed and there should be more diverse schemes and projects to account for this. The group felt that the 'bottom line' problem with provision is that there is not enough funding being put into youth housing and support projects for young people.

Surely we should be pushing money into quality youth housing, and it'd save money later because you won't get young people going into the secure estates, mental hospitals, young people physically ill.

(Practitioner, Birmingham)

Different models of provision were suggested at the events including:

- small young people's housing schemes for four or five young people with separate accommodation but also communal living space and full housing support;

- linked schemes that work through progressional stages through supported and semi-supported to independent living;
- one young person felt a tower block scheme could be created with services and facilities on the ground floor and then supported accommodation at the bottom rising to independent accommodation at the top;
- smaller supported accommodation schemes for people leaving care (for four or five young people);
- accommodation that will accept young people with higher support needs.

It was suggested that there should be more research with young people on preferences and types of youth housing required, including shared housing. In addition, practitioners felt there could be further exploration of the role of shared living for young people – for example, whether some young people's outcomes might be much improved if they were not isolated and had some proper form of support.

A further area of future activity would be to focus on hostel provision: examining how to improve conditions and affordability, and provide more appropriate accommodation for different subgroups of young people. This could be linked to research into moving-on procedures and how hostels can better support young people to make the transition to independent living. This project could be undertaken as a comparative research study in the Cardiff and Birmingham contexts.

More flexibility between tenures a strong message

Some practitioners wanted more flexibility in the housing system that would allow young people to move around, for example through the provision of more 'portable' products, and allow two-way migration between tenures.

Further research was suggested exploring the appeal of the private rented sector versus home ownership to young people. Why, for example, do people in the UK not have the same belief in private renting as abroad? Is it because of high

rents and lack of security, or are there other issues too?

Education and information

Young people would like the provision of information packs on private renting from the landlord. This was mentioned as part of the accreditation scheme for landlords but a project could look specifically at what is currently provided and how that could be made more young people-friendly.

Demonstration projects showcasing good practice or supporting pilot projects to help young people make the transition to independent living from a range of backgrounds, including from the family home, care and children's units, were suggested. The absence of good-practice examples currently available for people moving out of the family home was noted.

Other suggestions included:

- research with young people to explore what a training programme in preparing young people for independent living should look like;
- demonstration projects showcasing good practice on peer educators' programmes such as Moving On in Edinburgh and St Basil's STaMP and their value in helping young people prepare for independent living, and budgeting and money management projects;
- research project on how to inform young people about housing options, working with agencies such as schools and the police to identify key information access routes and referral points to housing support;
- demonstration project in schools piloting housing materials, and games to help young people understand their options, rights and how to plan for their future. The use of peer educators, to whom young people can relate, was recommended in the delivery of these projects;
- research project developing online housing information and access points, involving young people in designing an online housing

information and advice service for young people. Young people should be involved in the design and content of the site, to ensure it appeals to their peers and addresses young people's housing issues. This could be an important signposting service to local support services, to help young people with specific housing concerns to access more detailed and specialist advice and support.

Support

Some young people felt all young people should have access to support workers, including those moving out of the family home. One option could be an extension of the Connexions Service for over 19 year olds, to provide on-demand support when required.

A demonstration project was suggested, based on good practice from the supported living project in the Wirral. This would combine personal ongoing support with clear materials and information owned by the young person, to empower them to take responsibility and make a sustained transition into independent living.

Longer-term evaluation of projects, policies, and needs

Suggested under this broad heading were:

- longitudinal research on what services are really beneficial for a young homeless person over a five-year or longer period;

- monitoring outcomes of different projects on young people's housing transitions;
- assessing success of different models of transition support (for example, the Foyer model, Supporting People Floating Support, hostels etc.) linked to ongoing support;
- comparing projects: which projects were working better than others? Practitioners felt that this critical, comparative evidence base was weak;
- a piece of work looking at how housing transitions and choices in particular fit into broader sets of decision-making processes for young people.

Keep talking

Practitioners and young people emphasised the need to keep young people involved. The suggestion was made for a conference involving large numbers of young people, including an open forum, for 'questions and answers' on how to improve young people's housing transitions.

Appendix

Methodology

The study comprised two main strands enabling UK-wide conversations with a variety of practitioners working with young people and with a range of young people themselves. The two strands were:

- a ‘young persons housing conversation’ event in each of the four UK administrations involving practitioners and young people;
- a web log or blog created after the events for young people and practitioners working with young people to have their say and share in the discussions.

In addition, telephone interviews with practitioners working with young people in each of the four regions started the conversation with service providers, assisted with recruitment of young people and helped shape the events by providing information on local issues. ECOTEC also spoke to some academic researchers.

The events

ECOTEC Research and Consulting Limited carried out a half-day event in each of the four UK administrations where workshops took place enabling both separate and joint conversations between young people and practitioners on various issues relating to young people’s housing experiences. We took a deliberative approach to the event, facilitating participants, both young people and practitioners, to shape their own ideas around young people’s housing issues.

The events took place in community-based venues where young people felt comfortable, in Edinburgh, Belfast, Cardiff and Birmingham, over a two-week period at the beginning of April 2008.

The format for each event followed the same structure, including an initial welcoming talk about the aim of the conversations, the agenda for the afternoon and the wider objectives of the research. This allowed time for registration, signposting to the workshops and any questions.

Two workshops then ran concurrently for about an hour and a half each – one for practitioners and one for young people.

The young people workshop looked at the key issues facing young people looking for housing using different activities starting with a timeline exercise. Two facilitators worked in the session enabling small groups of young people to work together on an activity. The purpose was to explore the ups and downs young people experience in working towards their chosen tenure, or type of housing, by looking at where they were living now, how they got there and where they would like to be. This was followed by a dartboard exercise looking at the barriers blocking the transition to independent living, with an outer circle for ‘less important barriers’, the middle circle for ‘important barriers’ and the inner circle detailing ‘key barriers’. The final exercise in the workshop was also a dartboard exercise but this time looking at possible solutions which help young people to move on to their own independent accommodation.

The practitioners workshop started with a round table introduction session where participants introduced the organisation they worked for and their involvement with young people’s housing issues. This allowed opportunities for networking and learning between service providers. This was followed by an initial open discussion setting the scene, looking at the key issues facing young people looking for housing today, the housing choices young people are making, and consideration of young people’s housing and life aspirations. The workshop then focused on an activity (events with six or more practitioners were split into two smaller groups) looking at transition routes and trends in young people’s housing, good-practice examples which support transition and, finally, ideas for future service provision which would address gaps in current provision.

At the end of these workshops there was a refreshment break and an opportunity for participants to vote on their preferred design for the blog due to be launched in the following few weeks. Six designs, numbered one to six, were arranged and labelled on a poster advertising the domain name ‘youngpeoplemovingon.org.uk’ with a tick sheet placed nearby to allow people to vote. An explanation of the aim of the blog was given and participants were encouraged to post

comments and views on it once it was launched.

After the break, the two groups were combined into a plenary session lasting about half an hour, looking at how to make it easier for young people to find suitable long-term homes. The participants were divided into smaller mixed groups of practitioners and young people. The purpose was to explore the alternative routes people take to address problems and access the information and services they need, and also to see what new resources the groups would like to see developed in the future to make it easier for young people to find suitable long-term homes. In small groups, participants were asked to design a route map to explore the possible paths a young person could take with a start and end point decided by the group. Together the group was asked to look at what was needed to reach the end goal, including information, services and support, and whether or not these currently existed. The purpose of this exercise was to facilitate a discussion between young people and practitioners, to help increase young people's awareness of housing services already in existence and to challenge practitioners' views on the type of services young people need. The exercise was designed to have a practical impact on the ground, by informing local housing service delivery and planning for future housing projects and support activities.

Finally, to close the event, participants were asked to write on two separate post-it notes: 'What is the most important housing issue for young people today?' and 'If you were prime minister, what would you change?'

The post-it notes were colour-coded for young people and practitioners. These were placed on a flip chart allowing a final round-up of the priority issues coming out of the event, an opportunity for further questions and a thank you to all involved. Participants were asked to leave contact details if they would be interested in being contacted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in terms of being involved in any future activity coming from these events.

Participants

Each event was organised with the aim of attracting up to ten practitioners and up to ten young people to participate in the afternoon workshops. The numbers achieved varied between locations but overall 39 young people and 22 practitioners participated.

The experiences and current housing situations of the young people aged 16 to 30 varied considerably, allowing the conversations to obtain the views of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds. Participants included the long-term street homeless, young people living in the parental home, young people moving out of care, through student life and also into many different types of housing – hostel accommodation, private rented sector, social rented housing. Some of the practitioners were themselves aged under 30 and shared their experiences of looking for accommodation. The majority of the young people participants were male (24) but there were 15 young women at the events too, allowing housing issues relating to gender to emerge. The young people included participants from a range of ethnic backgrounds and included young people in training, studying and in employment as well as unemployed.

The practitioners working with young people attending the events reflected a diverse range of generalist and specialist services from various policy and practice arenas, including housing providers, advice services, support providers, employment and young people's services.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has supported this project as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Foundation.

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About the authors

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