

The Youth Housing Charter Evaluation Report



Background

The Youth Housing Charter

Youth Homeless North East was approached by Durham County Council to produce a Youth Housing Charter for implementation by the Housing Solutions Team to ensure the specific needs and long-term aspirations of homeless young people in Durham are met. Durham County Council's Housing Solutions Team has adopted The Youth Housing Charter and it will be considered as part of the Homeless Strategy review in 2013.

The young people who took part in the research and whose experiences and opinions are presented in The Charter wanted to know how The Youth Housing Charter would be used and if it would make a difference. In response to that question our intention is to encourage all local authorities and wider services providers in the North East to endorse the Youth Housing Charter to ensure housing and support services provided for homeless young people are informed and shaped by what young people want.

Across the region 60 young people affected by homelessness, aged 16- 26 years old, and participated in the research. All of the young people involved had experience of homelessness or were at risk of becoming homeless.

The full report can be viewed here:

<http://youthhomelessnortheast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Housing-CharterandPathway-yhne-edit.pdf>

The Youth Housing Charter forms part of the action plan for the North East Regional Homelessness Group representing all 12 NE local authorities.

Charter Evaluation Aim

'To gauge the local impact of The Youth Housing Charter'

We wanted the charter to be evaluated by a group of young people using a youth inspector approach and supported by Sunderland Youth Inspectors, Your Homes Newcastle and YHNE. Young people were trained by Sunderland Youth Inspectors, Youth Homeless North East and Your Homes Newcastle.

The findings and recommendations from the evaluation will directly influence a revised YHNE Youth Housing Charter in 2016.

Methodology

The recruitment and training of young people utilised young people from YHNE Regional Champions. The Regional Champions are based in 4 sub regions of the north east these are:

- Centrepoint - Youth Educators
- Your Homes Newcastle -Youth Voice
- Barnardos – Links Hexham
- Community Campus 87

The young people were trained as YHNE Charter Evaluators. The Charter Evaluators were then tasked with creating a list of questions to ask professionals and service users based on the charter. The Charter Evaluators identified questions which covered the following themes:

- Prevention
- Housing
- The area
- Support

The evaluation took place in two stages. The first stage was for the Charter Evaluators to meet with a minimum of two members of senior housing staff. They would be interviewed with questions relating to the charter. The second stage of the charter would be to interview young people currently or previously living in supported accommodation a youth friendly version of the questions asked to staff. The Charter Evaluators will then amalgamate the findings and offer key recommendations.

The YHNE 2015 annual survey released digitally incorporated specific questions related to the Charter that also formed part of the evaluation process. 11/12 LA's participated in this.

Five local authorities were evaluated in the region by the Charter Evaluators. All Evaluators involved had no local connection to any of the areas evaluated.

18 young people were interviewed from across the region.

Findings

YHNE Survey of Youth Homelessness Charter Questions

- Local authorities had been proactive in undertaking prevention activities.
- The most frequently identified need (beyond suitable housing) among young people was a lack of independent living skills.
- Conciliation and mediation services were reported as the second largest preventative measure provided by LA's in the YHNE 2015 Survey.
- All housing associations and agencies provided advice and information, help accessing benefits and signposting to other agencies for young homeless people.
- The area, suitability and location the young person would be housed is taken into account where possible.

The full survey document can be viewed here:

<http://youthhomelessnortheast.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/YHNE-Survey-Report-2015-3.pdf>

Prevention

Every local authority evaluated by the Charter Evaluators stated that they had sufficient services relating to preventative measures, such as education, mediation and preparation skills. This was also mirrored in the YHNE survey findings.

Young person responses

All young people reported that they were not provided with enough education on homelessness in schools. They were not aware of any support and because of this felt that they had *"slipped through the cracks" – a young person's view on their personal experience.*

Mediation was found to be offered by all local authorities.

77% of the young people interviewed felt they had been offered sufficient preparation for living independently, whilst in supported accommodation.

However all young people stated prior to entering supported accommodation, life-skills and preparation for living independently was not taught in enough detail in schools

Housing

Every local authority reported providing adequate services in regard to:

- Ensuring that all housing offered to young people is secure with enough staffing.
- Help young people to secure permanent accommodation.

- Respect young peoples' rights within the context of balancing rights with responsibilities.

Young person responses

Young people told us they prefer a face to face meeting rather than telephone interviews.

"It's like walking up to a complete stranger and telling them all about your life and every secret you have ever had." – A young person's view on phone scripting when presenting as homeless.

61% of young people reported that they had sufficient support and they were shown around the proposed housing prior to them moving in.

39% of young people interviewed felt they had no choice in where they were allocated or what support they were offered.

Some young people felt pressured to accept housing allocated to avoid making themselves intentionally homeless.

Where young people live

Every local authority reported adequate services in regard to :

- Providing housing to young people in an area they know, where they are aware of available facilities and services.
- Ensuring young people move to an area where they will feel safe and welcomed taking into account individual needs
- When young people want it, offer housing in an area close to family, carers, friends and support networks.

Young person responses

Most young people reported when allocated supported accommodation, it was located centrally within the city centre and close to transport links.

12% of Young people explained that they had not wanted to move centrally within the city as they had to leave friends and family and they struggle to afford transport costs to return to their local area.

All young people interviewed felt safe after they had an induction into the supported accommodation allocated to them.

Support

Every local authority reported adequate services in regard to:

- Ensuring young people who have been in-care receive the support they want from Children's Services and are able to maintain contact with foster carers.
- Providing flexible support to support young people for as long as needed when experiencing difficulties.
- Where possible ensure young people have one worker
- Ensure workers are suitably qualified and have a good knowledge of homelessness and understand the issues young people face.

Young person responses

22.2% of young people interviewed were care-leavers. All stated that they felt they were not offered enough support during the transitional period between leaving care and moving to independence.

Young people stated that in their current situation they have enough support and feel their issues and problems are actively listened to.

Young people identified that extra support such as floating support would have been greatly beneficial, however they were not made aware of the service. This was a reoccurring theme across all interviews.

All young people identified the importance of having one key worker where possible. While running this session YHNE also conducted an activity that looked at what young people felt was the most important theme of the YHNE charter. The number one theme across the region was for the young person to have one worker.

Recommendations

As part of the evaluation, the Charter Evaluators were asked to make key recommendations taking into account both the views of the professionals and the young people interviewed. The Evaluators made the following recommendations:

Prevention

- Include more education on homelessness in schools and youth centres.

Support

- Actively refer young people to floating support services as the evaluators saw this as a very cost effective way of reducing risk of young people becoming homeless.
- Front line and senior staff to have a sound knowledge of homelessness and the issues young people face. This was to ensure that even the very senior workers who usually wouldn't come into contact with young people normally are made aware of current issues and barriers young people face.
- Where possible, the option to choose the gender of the worker.
- When possible, homeless assessments with young people should be in person and not over the phone.
- Actively try and ensure that a young person has one key worker to develop trust and develop a working relationship.

Inclusion

- Encourage young people to be involved in local planning to address youth homelessness including LA pathway meetings.

Revising the Youth Housing Charter

Young people still endorse the original Charter criteria which they believe continues to reflect the needs of young people with a number of exceptions:

1. A concentrated effort to ensure all staff who are likely to come into contact with young people are trained and up to date on the issues young people face.
2. Every young person up to the age of 25 should have equal access to homeless prevention and housing support, regardless of their situation.