Evaluation:
Youth Homelessness
North East (YHNE)

Interim Report
5\textsuperscript{th} July 2013

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Introduction
This interim report represents a summary of progress to date and forms part of a more comprehensive evaluation of the work of Youth Homelessness North East (YHNE) undertaken by GB Associates, due for completion in November 2013. The evaluation will consider the structure and management of YHNE, its relationship with Regional Champions, young people and members, progress against aims to date, determine to what extent it has achieved its vision and aims, identify key achievements and identify actions to improve the organisation. This report reflects a thorough review of secondary data (Appendix One) including progress to date and will assist in focusing forthcoming primary research and action planning for the organisation.

Background and Context
Formerly the Regional Youth Homelessness Network, YHNE was established in 2007 through support from Homeless Link and the Department for Communities and Local Government. The organisation provides a regional focus and resources and facilitates addressing youth homelessness through policy and strategy. It describes itself as an ‘independent, action driven community of young people, strategists, commissioners and providers of youth homelessness services’. Its establishment was underpinned by two concerns:

1. A lack of clear objectives for tackling youth homelessness in regional policy and strategy.
2. An unevenness of good practice within frontline services.

YHNE’s vision is: ‘To prevent, tackle and resolve homelessness experienced by young people aged 16 to 25 years old in the North East of England’ and it aims to:

• Provide a voice for young people to influence service provision
• Influence policy and strategy through collaborative activity
• Promote innovation and best practice in preventing and tackling homelessness
• Bring about change to end youth homelessness

Northern Rock Foundation (NRF) provide funding for a full-time YHNE Regional Manager who is responsible for the overall delivery of work strands, continued development of YHNE and development of its membership, running to November 2013. Alongside this, there is further NRF funding for work such as the YHNE website.

Other funding has been provided via the Millfield House Foundation (MHF), initially for the role of a Trainee Development Worker and subsequently a Project Assistant. YHNE receives support from Centrepoint’s North Regional Office in Durham who host YHNE, manage NRF funds and line-manage the Regional Manager (with further support from Centrepoint head office). Barnardos, through Places of Change, provide funding and support to involve young people in the work of YHNE via Regional Champions, who work directly with young people.

Regional Champions are Barnardo’s in Northumberland, Community Campus ‘87 in Tees Valley, Youth Educators in County Durham (from 2013 - previously Moving On who withdrew having lost funding for their participation work) and the Youth Independence Forum in Tyne & Wear.
Management and Structure
YHNE is an unincorporated organisation, independent of, though supported and hosted by, Centrepoint. YHNE is also supported by its own (i.e. as opposed to Centrepoint’s) voluntary Steering Group made up of six people, all with varied and substantial experience of youth homelessness and service delivery. There are currently over 160 individuals and organisations as members of YHNE, including representatives from the voluntary and community sector, housing associations and officers from the twelve local authorities across the region.

There are two YHNE members of staff: a Regional Manager and Project Assistant. Originally a Regional Co-ordinator was appointed in November 2010, leaving in November 2011: Sharon Brown took up her post in January 2012, with the job title later changing to Regional Manager. Substantial professional added value has been brought to YHNE via Sharon’s expertise and knowledge, reinforced through the expertise and knowledge of Centrepoint personnel and the Steering Group.

Involvement of Young People and Members
Young people are at the core of YHNE’s work: directly through attending and contributing to events organised by YHNE and indirectly through the work and services of YHNE’s partner and member organisations. There is evidence of the extensive engagement and involvement of young people:

- In 2012, YHNE surveyed local authorities and homelessness service providers, looking to develop an understanding of youth homelessness (for those aged 16-24) in the North East.

- Contribution to the development of ‘The Youth Housing Charter’ based on the review of evidence produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and participatory research with the involvement of 59 young people.

- Campaigning through the ‘Making Change Happen’ partnership agreement with Barnardos and other regional partners on issues affecting homeless young people: youth unemployment, single room rate housing benefit, inequality, including reviewing Registered Social Landlord allocation policies in line with Housing Corporation guidance.

- With the support of Regional Champions and other partner organisations, preparation for and participation in quarterly themed events.

- Planning and delivering of two ‘Strategy for Change’ conferences with a focus on bringing key partners, policy makers and decision makers together to present the work of YHNE including the Regional Youth Housing Strategy, The Youth Housing Charter, the ‘Transitions: Moving into your own place’ report and to begin a planning process using the ‘Youth Accommodation Pathway’ circulated by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

Responses from event and activities show substantial positive feedback:

“....it makes me glad to know people are trying to improve the way we are treated....it was great to meet other professionals and in particular young people....different organisations and young people attending...”
Clear benefits were also identified:

“...there are more links available....links with mental health, self esteem and self worth...what young people really want...priorities are often different to providers...”

Sharing and promoting good practice
YHNE has developed its role as a conduit and supplier of information and data relating to homelessness and young people. Some of its achievements have included:

- A YHNE website which provides a regional resource to members, partners and young people, with information, news events research and good practice.
- Establishing and hosting the North East Homeless Think Tank
- Working with local authorities and other partners on a joint approach to ‘No Second Night Out’.
- Setting up a page on partner websites such as Centrepoint, Homeless Link etc. to promote the work of the YHNE, establishing a blog and online network.
- Developing the YHNE membership.
- The only regional picture of homelessness currently available, with plans to develop annual research.
- Building links between YHNE and representatives of the twelve North East local authorities.
- The ‘hub and spoke’ structure of the Regional Champions initiative has done much to reach out to and provide young people with a voice and influence to inform youth homelessness strategy and provision.

Progress against aims
Evidence shows that YHNE has made substantial progress against identified aims. The NRF funding of the Regional Manager set out three clear activities for the role: to undertake a gap analysis, collate and disseminate good practice amongst partners, members and stakeholders and to write a Regional Youth Housing Strategy. All of these have been achieved (see Appendix Two).

Appendix Two also identifies areas where significant added value has been achieved over and above the requirements of the NRF funding, such as work around the establishment of the North East Youth Homelessness Think Tank. There are also instances where the project management re-focused activity in order to maximise impact: for example where the Providers Network moved to themed events as it was felt these would be more appropriate and useful for participants. Other notable achievements have been the increase in members, rising from 50 in Year One of the project to the current figure of over 160.
Evidence of value

The table in Appendix Two provides a useful summary of some of the successes of YHNE over its lifetime. It demonstrates that YHNE has not only achieved what it set out to through NRF funding but in some areas of work has added significant value through increased focus and professionalism.

A key achievement for YHNE has been the development and delivery of the homelessness survey: initially carried out in March 2012 and then repeated a year later. This survey set out to explore five key areas:

- Levels of youth homelessness in a ‘snapshot’ month – and to identify changes from the previous year
- The causes of youth homelessness
- The support needs of young homeless people
- The availability of support services
- The impact of welfare reform

Research findings, supported by the contribution of the 12 North East local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and other partners have contributed to the creation of a valuable tool to support the development of strategy and services around youth homelessness. Much useful information has been gathered and key trends identified: the importance of relationship breakdown in youth homelessness, the significant rise in rent arrears and benefit changes as an important issue and the decrease in the availability of external services for homeless young people. Key to this has been the opportunity to repeat the survey: helping to identify trends and changes in a complex and challenging area of work.

Events have also contributed to the impact and influence of YHNE. A conference, entitled: ‘Tackling Youth Homelessness-A Joined up Approach’ was held in 2011 and brought together over sixty people: young people, representatives from organisations working with homeless young people and those deemed at risk of homelessness across the region. The conference also included Commissioners, Senior Managers and Chief Officers from leading agencies in the region. The 2011 conference set, through consultation, the original 5 priorities around which the Regional Youth Housing Strategy strategy was built. However, this was not an end in itself and YHNE has continued to work to take forward and develop this important strategic initiative.

Two major regional ‘Strategy for Change’ conferences were held December 2012 and January 2013, bringing together over 60 delegates with all twelve North East local authorities represented as well as other partner organisations. These conferences consulted on and presented the Regional Youth Housing Strategy and other key YHNE work and activities. Further development of the Regional Youth Housing Strategy is evidenced by the addition of a sixth priority drawn from the consultation
work, which in turn fed into a planning process using the Youth Accommodation Pathway: establishing that HEN can add value in bringing research and data but can also instigate planning.

The conferences have taken forward the work of YHNE, making a valuable contribution to local planning to address youth homelessness and helping to ensure the work of YHNE is used to inform local strategic development and service delivery. The second ‘Strategy for Change’ conference launching the Final Regional Youth Housing Strategy played a strong role in setting the national context, with important input from the Chief Executive of Homeless Link, from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the DCLG. Further development is planned as YHNE look to develop ways of gauging the impact of this: measuring how the ideas and approaches generated are being used. This work is particularly well timed as most local authorities are in the process of renewing their homeless strategies.

In addition to strategic regional conferences, YHNE also run themed events bringing together young people, commissioners, service providers and strategists. All of the themed events have been well attended by all stakeholder groups with up to 70 attending, with around half being made up of young people. Themes have included Early Intervention and Prevention, Moving On and Transitions. Importantly, as noted above, the events provide a place where providers of services and recipients of services can engage in a structured and purposeful conversation with the ultimate aim of improving those services. This represents a substantial change to the traditional approach of professionals, often working together without the involvement of or in the absence of service users. The most recent themed event, ‘Listening to Young People’ again achieved excellent levels of feedback from young people who attended, including:

- 100% of young people said they felt their views were listened to.
- 100% of young people said they got the chance to share your opinions and ideas
- 92% of young people said that what they had learned today was useful to them

There is also evidence that themed events are not simply opportunities for discussion but have a clear focus on action. At each event, there is encouragement for individual organisations to take on and deliver action points: for example, at this event, Stockton Borough Council agreed to include young people in their decision-making processes and Endeavour Housing stated they would establish peer support groups within their organisation. Further, a ‘Listening to Young People Guide’ was drawn up as a result of involvement and engagement from young people and importantly, structuring an approach to listening to young people to better understand what they needed from services providers.

Another themed event, ‘Early Intervention and Prevention’ demonstrated similar positive findings from those young people who took part. One respondent identified a key issue: when asked what they had learnt from the event, they stated ‘Learning what young people really want – priorities are often different to providers’. Professionals working with young people and housing also noted that
key areas had been identified: networking, information, sharing practice and young people’s involvement.

While a summary of activities can demonstrate the breadth of work undertaken, it is important to also to consider the quality of those activities. Evaluation activity can provide useful indications of the experiences of participants and can provide more effective evidence of the outcomes of the work. Evaluation feedback from a regional conference was analysed to explore issues and to understand in more depth the value of the event to its participants both in the short and medium term.

Key feedback findings suggested that YHNE was seen as a ‘necessary organisation’ in terms of sharing good practice, providing a sign-posting service and most importantly bringing service users and providers together to talk about the issue: this was seen as a unique quality of YHNE. Levels of satisfaction with events were very high: one conference was rated by 75% of participants as ‘excellent’ and the remaining 25% rated it as ‘very good’. Further evidence of the effectiveness of the conference was shown in the fact that in excess of forty participants expressed a willingness to participate in sub regional forums following the event.

Strengths and Weaknesses
As part of the funding criteria, NRF require annual reports on progress of funded projects and the three reports reviewed showed both clarity over recognition of strengths and weaknesses and evidence of learning and development over the period of review. The 2011 YHNE report to NRF highlighted the regional coverage of YHNE and the ability to bring together service providers and users. Weaknesses were regarded as the ambitious nature and sheer scale of the project which made it difficult to administer. A related weakness was the ability to effectively promote and publicise the organisation. This latter point was addressed via additional funding from NRF to help set up a website which has proven its worth in terms of providing an information and connecting resource.

The 2012 report to NRF highlighted a number of additional strengths, including: a strong membership and growth in membership numbers; a willingness from members and partners to work with YHNE; the development of a structure to involve young people; structured planning and evaluation in progress with clear timescales and deadlines; a strong and supportive Steering Group and a name change! A key strength of the work of YHNE relates to the survey work it has undertaken. It has produced the only clear regional picture of youth homelessness in the country, helping to improve understanding of and planning to address youth homelessness in the region: in addition to meeting this target, YHNE have now repeated the work, helping to provide a stronger understanding of the context and development of this issue.
Challenges were identified as lack of administrative support, reliance on partners to develop work strands, complex and ambitious work strands and expansion of resources to support young people’s involvement.

Summary
From the initial review of progress to date, there is clear evidence that YHNE has had a significant and growing impact: it has exceeded its original aims in delivering a range of services and activities set out in its initial NRF application. This has been achieved in challenging economic circumstances and despite changes in staffing.

Strengths include YHNE’s contribution to and promotion of effective partnership working and the professional expertise and approach it brings in both facilitation and leadership: it is clearly a respected and valued organisation. A challenge for YHNE is to better understand and evidence the value and impact of the links and connections it makes: impact such as the development and implementation of new ideas and approaches, wider application of best practice, more effective approaches through partnership and co-operation, integration of actions as well as time saved. A crucial strength, where YHNE has a clear leadership role is in terms of giving a voice to young people at a strategic level. Many organisations claim to ‘consult’ young people, but moving beyond tokenistic approaches is challenging: YHNE is providing an excellent example of good practice in this area.

The organisation has grown and developed through careful evaluation of its work and an open and flexible approach: there is clear evidence that it has played an important role in bringing about change as well as promoting innovation and good practice. The survey work is has undertaken is a crucial element of this. There are, however, opportunities to further develop and improve the organisation and this interim report has identified some of the key areas to explore. These include consideration of the structure of YHNE, in order to identify sustainable options for its future work and development. The role and make-up of the Steering Group also requires review and consideration. Relationships with key groups such as Regional Champions, young people and in particular with members are also important: developing, clarifying and implementing effective two-way relationships which provides both mutual benefits and adds value.

Neil Gardiner and Judith Brown: GB Associates
July 2013
Appendix One

Documents reviewed:

- Centrepoint’s ‘Statement of Support’ for Regional Youth Homelessness Network’s Northern Rock Foundation application
- Charter celebrations 11-12-12
- Early Intervention and Prevention report June 2013
- Events evaluations (various)
- Joint Protocols (Darlington, Durham and North Tyneside)
- Learning and Support report 24-04-12
- Listening to Young People 13-05-13
- Listening to young people 31-5-13
- Millfield House Foundation report April 2013
- Millfield House Foundation update October 2012
- Move On event report 03-04-12
- North East Homeless Think Tank (meeting notes and research)
- North East Homelessness Think Tank application to Northern Rock Foundation September 2012
- Northern Rock Foundation Evaluation Planning form 2012-13
- Northern Rock Foundation Regional Youth Homelessness Network application 2009
- Northern Rock Foundation supporting statement by Centrepoint and Youth Homelessness North East for second round funding
- Northern Rock Foundation Welfare application
- Northern Rock Foundation’s supporting statement by Centrepoint for first round funding
- Regional Champions (meeting reports, SLA)
- Regional Homelessness group (meeting notes)
- Strategy For Change 30-01-13
- Supporting letter from Youth Homelessness North East to the Millfield House Foundation
- Transitions event 16-10-12
- Year 1 report by Youth Homelessness North East to Northern Rock Foundation 2011
- Year 2 report by Youth Homelessness North East to Northern Rock Foundation 2012
- Year 3 report by Youth Homelessness North East to Northern Rock Foundation 2013
- YHNE Co-ordinators Reports, Board reports
- YHNE Steering Group notes (February, March, June, July, September 2012 and February 2013)
- YHNE website
- Youth Educators programme
- Youth Homelessness in the North East survey September 2012
- Youth Homelessness North East application to the Millfield House Foundation
## Appendix Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Output</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Appoint Regional Manager</td>
<td>Achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Survey of youth homelessness</td>
<td>Establish a Task &amp; Finish Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Survey of LA’s and service providers</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increase representation of gap analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Survey completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good practice</td>
<td>2 x regional conferences (Strategy for Change – Dec 2012, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy for Change 2 Jan 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings with policy makers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 themed events to date</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Establish a proforma &amp; circulate to all members</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good practice shared on website and YHNE events</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Regional Youth Housing Strategy</td>
<td>Compiled based on 5 themes identified at 2011 conference and</td>
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<td>endorsed by North Regional Housing Board,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Further research and consultation at Strategy for Change event 2012</td>
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<td>to produce draft</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final Strategy &amp; action plan launched, Strategy for Change 2 – Jan 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Members</td>
<td>Themed events &amp; Regional Events</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Champions established to support involvement of young people</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attend local and regional events: promotional and fact-finding</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Members and young people supported by Regional Champions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Replace bi-monthly meetings with themed events</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Three themed events 2012,</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young Peoples Involvement</td>
<td>Involvement supported by 4 Regional Champions in each of the 4 sub</td>
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<td>regions</td>
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<td>Barnardo’s – Northumberland</td>
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<td>Community Campus – Tees Valley</td>
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<td>Youth Voice (Your Homes Newcastle) – Tyne &amp; Wear</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Moving On – Durham during 2012</td>
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<td>Yr 3 – Lifewise (Centrepoint) – Durham from 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Via Barnardo’s Participation Manager and volunteers</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Recruit Beneficiaries</td>
<td>Approximately 50 members</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Approximately 60 members</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Approximately 160 members</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Participatory research: Youth Housing Charter</td>
<td>A Task &amp; Finish Group established</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>59 young people involved from across the region</td>
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<td>Charter produced</td>
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<td>Presented at Parliament</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yr 3 Presented to LA’s and SP’s</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2 | Participatory research: Transitions of young people leaving care on behalf of Newcastle City Council | Young researchers recruited
Research report produced
Findings presented to European team of researchers
Findings promoted to LA’s and SP’s – Yr2 &3 |
| 2 | Website | Promote and provide information:
About YHNE
Young people’s involvement
Strategy resources
Policy & research
News & events
Models of practice
Where to go for accommodation
NEHTT
NSNO regional information |
| 2 | Transition |  |
| 2 | North East Homelessness Think Tank | YHNE initiated the establishment of NEHTT made up of: academics, researchers and policy officers working within the homeless sector and aims to inform and influence policies affecting and improve outcomes for homeless people via research, campaigning and collaborative activities. |
| 2 | Regional Homelessness Group | YHNE represented from 2012 |
| 3 | NSNO information for the region hosted on YHNE website |
| 2 | Administrative | Establish policies and procedure
Establish robust evaluation and monitoring mechanisms
Develop and instigate Terms of Reference |