

INSIGHT REPORT | JUNE 2025

HERE FOR YOU YOUTH-LED BLUEPRINT PROJECT

How do we ensure
that young people
experiencing
homelessness in our
city don't fall through
the gaps?



Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Executive summary & recommendations	4 – 7
3. Context	8 – 15
4. Insight findings	16 – 35
5. Reference sources	36 – 38



YOUNG PERSON

Services need more awareness. I didn't know there were places that could help for most of my time struggling.



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

I think the changes in housing process within the city are starting to link up and work really well and this survey encourages me that closer, more linked in work is being looked at and I hope that further improves support for young people going forward.



YOUNG PERSON

I am no longer homeless, but in the past, I think I lost faith that the system would help be able/willing to help me.



1. Introduction

According to the #YouthHomelessChapter campaign, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities conducted insight among rough sleepers, which found that 54% of them had experienced some form of homelessness (including sofa surfing) for the first time when under the age of 25. Worryingly, 48% of them had experienced rough sleeping for the first time before the age of 25. This makes accessing early advice and support critical. Yet many young people at risk of homelessness are unaware of available support and where to seek help.

Vulnerable young people often come from unstable and traumatic backgrounds, disrupting their education and limiting access to reliable information. Navigating services is challenging. The shortfall of information tailored specifically for young people through traditional communication methods often fails to reach or resonate.



YOUNG PERSON

We need more information for people in bad situations. A lot of people don't know what to do. Knowledge of how to leave home would have helped.
I wish I had left sooner, but I didn't know where to go.



Locally we also see the over-representation of young people of colour, young migrants, those with neurodivergence, identifying as LGBTQ+ and/or with mental health issues within our homelessness services and, compounded by their needs and marginalisation, see and hear how they find local systems unwelcoming, confusing and difficult to understand and access.

A grant from IMEX, brokered through Sussex Community Foundation enabled youth homelessness providers Sussex Nightstop, The Clocktower Sanctuary and YMCA DownsLink Group to conduct an insight project to better understand how young people seek out information and support in the city, so that we could understand how to improve.

Our combined aim is to interrupt their homelessness journey at the earliest point, so we can support them to make earlier decisions and enable them to leave unsafe situations in a safer, structured way. Ultimately, connecting them with support should accelerate access to a secure home - foundational to them accessing other positive life opportunities in work, relationships and learning. This also benefits the public purse: Centrepont estimates the cost of each young homeless person at £27,347.

Working together – strengthening our youth voice intelligence and coordinating our communications - enables our partnership of youth homelessness providers to have greater impact through our activities, to advocate better for young people's needs and influence systems at large to develop with these needs in mind.

This report was written in May 2025 in the enduring impacts of Covid and during the continuing cost of living crisis; a mental health epidemic among young people; public sector efficiency and cost-saving initiatives. It is only in 2024 that the first political debate around youth homelessness in 30 years took place.

2. Executive Summary

The aim of our 'Here for You' project was to develop a youth-led blueprint for homelessness services in the city of Brighton & Hove. As providers of services working exclusively with 16–25-year-olds, with activities designed to prevent, alleviate and remedy the experiences of homelessness for this group, the wider systemic changes in the city's youth homelessness pathway accelerated the need for us to look at the experiences of young people when first accessing advice and support on homelessness in the city.

Specifically, we wanted to shine a light on the challenges for young people accessing homelessness services locally, to amplify their voices in how we respond moving forward and to use our findings to inform and advocate for collective actions.

The engagement with our insight work by young people and youth/homelessness professionals has been willing and insightful and our findings are reflective of the context national research that follows in the insight report. They helpfully point us towards core themes, including the need to embed a youth-specific and trauma-informed response, an improved communication offer that demystifies what is available and by whom, the importance of face-to-face interactions - with the internet used as a 'gateway' into services and not the end result, the impact of effective advocacy and hand-holding and the desire for learning and information spaces for professionals.

The potential improvements in these areas are wide-ranging. Some - such as a single portal website or co-located services - will require design, investment and time. Others, however, underscore the importance of the human-to-human experience. If we are serious about prevention and/or uptake of services at any point in a young person's journey on homelessness, then the power of kindness and trust-building practices should not be underestimated for both young people and professionals.

The following tables summarise what young people in Brighton & Hove told us they need:

When they are finding services:

Awareness	Perceptions	Needs	Wants
<p>Low or no service knowledge: Youth Advice Centre 37% Clock Tower Sanctuary 45% Sussex Nightstop 49% Council Housing Advice 61%</p> <p>Recommendations from professionals, friends and acquaintances has impact.</p> <p>A well-informed system is needed.</p>	<p>9 out of 10 have a positive perception of the YAC, CTS & Nightstop but only 5 out of 10 have a positive perception of the council.</p> <p>BUT</p> <p>The council is the top source of service use, so well placed to signpost.</p> <p>Places that are discreet make young people more comfortable. They don't want to be seen as homeless.</p>	<p>Advocacy & help navigating the system</p> <p>Understandable information and advice</p> <p>Options I understand</p> <p>Practical help</p> <p>Social groups</p> <p>Good signposting</p> <p>Sympathetic listening</p> <p>A consistent response for all</p> <p>Encouragement to access</p> <p>Solutions</p> <p>Reassurance</p> <p>Help accessing work or education</p> <p>Explanations for no accommodation support offer and alternatives</p> <p>Help filling out forms</p>	<p>Friendly, kind people who are trauma informed</p> <p>knowledgeable</p> <p>non-judgemental</p> <p>non-discriminatory</p> <p>A service that's accessible; inclusive; person-centred</p> <p>easy to get to; walk-in; feels safe</p> <p>Services I need that are</p> <p>TRUSTED</p> <p>AVAILABLE</p> <p>Discreet</p> <p>Friendly website</p> <p>Multiple ways to contact</p> <p>Hand-holding by professionals</p>
<p><i>what we can do.....</i></p> <p>More promotion needed across services and in the community</p>	<p>The council has huge signposting potential to fill gaps in info, advice & support</p>	<p>Guidance to improve understanding, access & to better inform action/decisions</p>	<p>Welcoming, safe, walk-in front door services I trust</p>

When services are reaching out to and welcoming them:

Comms	Websites	People
<p>Posters and postcards in city hall, youth hubs, public places & community spaces - succinct, plain English, friendly tone</p> <p>Multiple hubs at youth touchpoints across the city</p> <p>More outreach in colleges, universities</p> <p>Outreach to migrant hotels</p> <p>Brochures for the council to give out at housing appointments</p> <p>Information in more places, in different areas</p> <p>A youth-specific service directory for young people and professionals</p> <p>Service collaboration, enabling wrap around provision</p>	<p>Welcoming mobile-friendly websites with story telling, case studies & reviews that resonate with different ages & situations and draw young people in</p> <p>Content that supports use as a preparation tool: open hours; access and contact info step-by-step process; checklist for statutory help; service directory & criteria no acronyms / glossary multiple ways to contact translation</p> <p>Different language for 16-18 and 18+</p> <p>Text light, with more info to delve into</p> <p>Improved SEO that includes questions + location and addresses intersectionality, including LGBTQ+, mental health and neurodiversity</p>	<p>Lived experience</p> <p>Queer-friendly</p> <p>Neurodivergent-friendly</p> <p>Explain inclusivity and accessibility</p> <p>Disability friendly</p> <p>Inclusive + services = reassuring (use visual cues)</p> <p>Non-vocal communications</p> <p>Trauma/neurodiverse aware</p> <p>Specialist roles, champions</p> <p>Smaller caseloads = better support</p> <p>Training & networking to improve cultural consistency across services</p> <p>Professionals getting together to enable effective signposting</p> <p>Cross-service information sharing</p> <p>Better data to inform understanding and support continual improvement</p>

Ultimately desk research points to prevention as the key to stemming the flow of youth homelessness and some professionals working in homeless and youth services in Brighton & Hove felt the prevention agenda has slipped and/or been compromised by a strong tendency towards crisis-response, further exacerbated by short-term initiatives that have insufficient time to gain traction, realise impact or gather meaningful learning.

The table below summarises successful preventative measures from around the country identified in our desk research:

Key themes from desk research: prevention

Education	Situation	System
<p>Education and awareness of service provision to enable early identification and help-seeking - creating a PSHE resource for pupils and a checklist for welfare leads based on the Upstream Scotland Pilot</p> <p>Better information about the rights of a young person and their options</p> <p>Advocacy to support informed choices</p>	<p>Services to support young people to remain in their family home, where appropriate - early intervention and holistic support</p> <p>Advocacy and advice services to prevent young people from losing their tenancy</p> <p>Assylum/refugee charities focused on prevention</p> <p>Timeley and accessible mental health services + early identification, assessment and support</p>	<p>Services to prevent rough sleeping</p> <p>Early prevention officer or homeless reduction caseworker at the council</p> <p>Sustaining tenancies team in social housing</p> <p>Mental health, housing and social services more joined up</p> <p>More Supported Lodgings hosts & Nightstop services</p> <p>Improved data to baseline need, benchmark service awareness and inform system improvements</p> <p>St Basils' Positive Pathway of support and multi-agency youth hubs</p>



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

From experience, collaboration needs planning. A change management plan to make it happen. And ongoing nurture. We are in tricky terrain now, especially re funding. We've just lost pathways to independence.



Referring back to the national context, it would seem clear from the enduring nature of drivers to youth homelessness and the upward trajectory of numbers that a reduction in youth homelessness is unlikely - and there will continue to be young people in our city who find themselves in these circumstances. The need then for early intervention services which may address crisis and/or minimise the impact of it, and which help ensure that the homelessness experience is as brief as possible, are vital.

Making these findings work for young people in Brighton & Hove

Our insight findings point us to the following recommendations

STRATEGY

- Recognise young people as a cohort with specific needs within the emerging Brighton & Hove Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping Strategy through a youth-specific homelessness chapter. This could include a cross-themed commissioning group that recognises the economic and social value outcomes of prevention and early intervention within youth homelessness work.
- Design and capacity-build the frontline response to youth homelessness and develop the case for resourcing a coherent and consistent 'front door' support offer with kindness, advocacy and navigation at its heart.

COMMUNICATION

- Design, deliver and consistently invest in a city-wide, young-people-facing communications initiative that puts inclusivity, clarity of service offer and an encouraging and supportive approach at the fore.
- Meet young people where they are through a city-wide educational and learning piece that raises understanding of the issues of youth homelessness across workers and individuals on the frontline and that builds a high-quality, collaborative and trauma-informed youth homelessness practice approach.

INSIGHT & IMPACT

- Maximise the engagement of young people in the ongoing co-production of services through joined up and representative youth voice initiatives.
- Work with academics to produce and implement a data strategy for the consistent measuring and therefore improved understanding of youth homelessness.

The universe of youth homelessness is broad, complex and diverse and so are the individual experiences of young people within it. What is clear from this insight is that we need to acknowledge the many journeys travelled into and out of homelessness and respond creatively to the multiplicity of ways in which young people engage and respond along the way.

With that in mind, this project has concentrated specifically on the awareness of and access to services when young people are seeking out help around homelessness and our findings provide

us with sufficient consensus for us to roll up our sleeves and get going on recommendations that will make improvements in this area.

Young people hold the answers here and their voice, insights and participation should remain a golden thread throughout any future work. They are central to its success, and it is incumbent on us then to ensure that we facilitate authentic opportunities for young people to be a meaningful part of this work ongoing, through co-production and other methods.

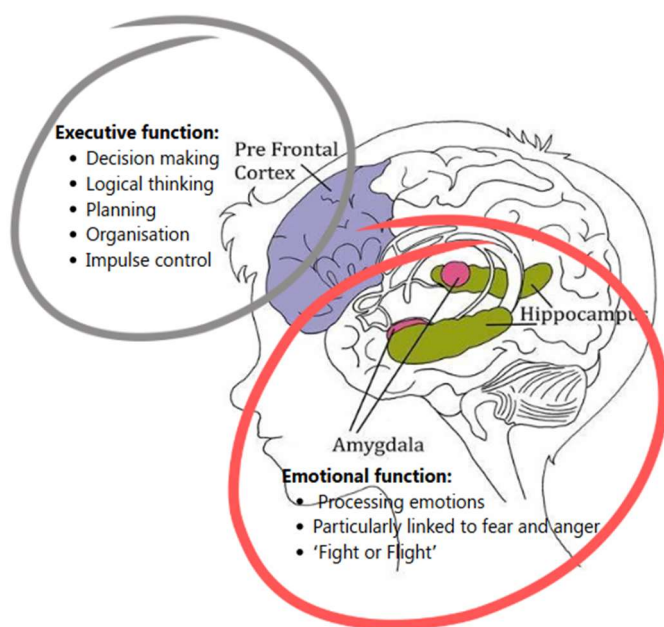
We take this closing opportunity to give an enormous thank you to all the young people who participated in our consultation and who shared their experiences so honestly and likewise to our co-workers and wider colleagues who gave us their time and professional insights.

We express our thanks to our funder IMEX who, facilitated by The Sussex Community Foundation, made it possible for us to carry out this project.

3. Context

3.1 The young brain

Neurodevelopmental science is clear – the young brain develops and responds differently. Two areas of the brain are particularly important: the Prefrontal Cortex and the Amygdala.



During adolescence, the brain goes through an incredible number of changes very quickly. This development continues until around our mid to late twenties, with new research suggesting in some people this could continue even until their thirties. Our brains develop from the back to the front, meaning the very last part to develop is the Prefrontal Cortex.

Adults think with the prefrontal cortex - the brain's rational part. This part of the brain responds to situations with good judgement and an awareness of long-term consequences. Young people can default to the emergency response (the Amygdala, or emotional part) to stresses, whereas

adults have learnt coping mechanisms to the emergency response and apply rational decision-making.

This information is fundamental to understanding why the delivery of services to young people might require a different approach and the profound impact that the teenage brain may have - not only on the engagement and access to services - but their impact. It is important to ensure that services do not expect the same abilities and reactions from young people who rationalise differently to adults, process risk and reward differently and possess an executive skill set [which analyses with logic and judgement] that is not fully formed.



YOUNG PERSON

It can be embarrassing...your brain is growing.... It can be a struggle. 1000 different emotions going on at the same time.



Research is also clear as to the impact of trauma on young brain development – an experience and consequence likely to be more prevalent within the group of young people experiencing homelessness. The importance of psychological safety then for young people is elevated. As Homeless Link notes:

'Young people accessing homelessness settings often have experiences of developmental trauma: early, repeated trauma and loss which happens within important relationships. This can affect brain

development, and young people's sense of safety in the world - which impacts their needs and behaviour.'

For some young people, such as those who are neurodivergent, or young trans people who are transitioning, there will be factors that further compound the above impacts and their need for psychological safety is elevated.



3.2 An environment stacked against young people

Young people experience a particular mix of challenges when it comes to a decent roof over their heads, identified in our desk research as:

- Housing supply and affordability
- No guarantor makes it unfeasible to secure a rental tenancy
- Cost of living increases vs lower pay and minimum wage jobs
- Increase in youth unemployment
- Welfare support offered and provided that is at a lower level to those over 25 years of age (austerity)
- Eligibility for housing assistance – according to Centrepont, only 18% of all those assessed meet the thresholds for support from local government

Young people also report via YMCA DownsLink Group services that there is a poverty of opportunity, wider system failure and broken mental health support structure, as well as wider societal issues such as loss of community/sense of belonging, limited access to education, employment and training.

3.3.1 The growing extent of youth homelessness nationally

Centrepont reports a 12% increase in England of young people seeking assistance from their local council due to homelessness concerns. According to their annual databank report in 2024 - [Hidden in Plain Sight: The Extent of Youth Homelessness in the UK](#) - 101,458 young people aged 16-25 in England approached their local council to ask for help in 2023-4; two-thirds of them were assessed and under a quarter were accepted as statutorily homeless.

Conversely, against growing numbers asking from help, Centrepont reports:

- The number of young people being assessed is falling, despite increasing demand. 79% of young people were assessed in 2018-19 and this figure was 65% in 2023-4.
- The number of young people offered support from their council was 64% in 2018-19 and 56% in 2023-4.

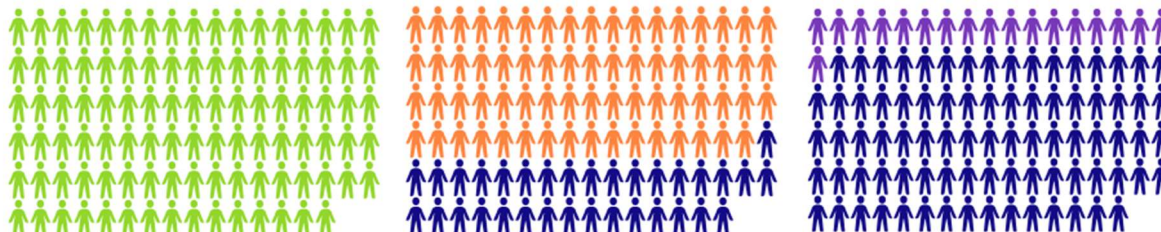
Centrepoint data (2023-4) snapshot

101,460 young people experiencing homelessness approached their council for help in 2023-4

101,460 young people in England approached their local authority for help in 2023-4

67% of those asking for help were assessed - the figure varies widely across locations

18% of young people assessed were accepted as statutorily homeless



SOURCE: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: UNDERSTANDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK, CENTREPOINT 2024

3.3.2 The tip of the iceberg

We know the youth homeless population is bigger than the figure above - and many young people don't seek help, for various reasons.

[A Place to Call Home](#) – the 2017 report from the Sage Foundation cites 'Recent studies of hidden youth homelessness across the nation have suggested that each night over 215,000 young people are sofa-surfing. Combined with the estimated figures on rough sleeping this amounts to 255,000 young people experiencing hidden homelessness every night (Clarke et al., 2015). This estimate is roughly 20 times larger than government figures for statutorily homeless young people (DCLG, 2016).'

The figure of 255,000 has been referred to by [Centrepoint](#) and New Horizon Youth Centre, among others. So, this is the best national 'universe' figure of youth homelessness that we can work with.

The bigger picture – all young people estimated as experiencing homelessness

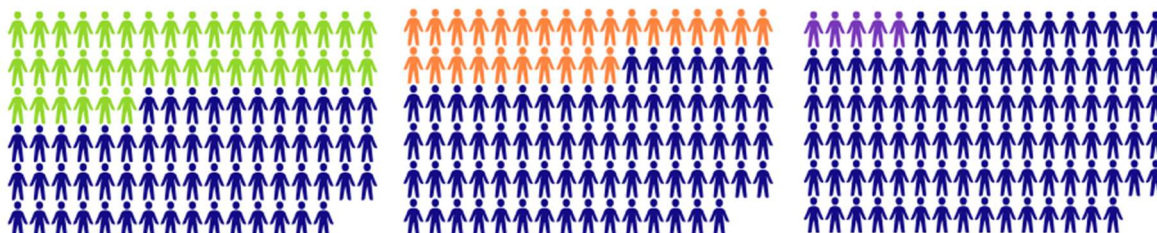
101,460 young people in England experiencing homelessness approached their council for help in 2023-4

255,000 young people in total are estimated to be experiencing homelessness in England

40% of the youth homeless 'universe' estimate approached their local authority for help in 2023-4

67% of those asking for help were assessed - this represents 27% of the youth homeless 'universe'

18% of young people assessed were accepted as statutorily homeless - this represents 5% of the total 'universe'



SOURCE: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: UNDERSTANDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK, CENTREPOINT 2024

SOURCE: CLARKE ET AL., 2015

Not all underserved young people are eligible for statutory support and, ironically, proving homelessness or demonstrating priority need can be more problematic for young people as compared to their older counterparts. For example, young people don't hold 'contracts' with family members so when this breaks down it can be hard to demonstrate homelessness if they are asked to leave. Limited historical or current access to and engagement with services can also mean that it is harder to meet thresholds around priority needs e.g. building a case around mental health.

But that doesn't mean they don't need help in some form – advice, guidance, signposting, advocacy or mediation being just some examples. According to Centrepoin, it is a minority of young people who are ineligible for housing assistance for reasons like having no recourse to public funds, which is linked to immigration status.*

The ability of councils to assess people is linked to financial pressures on local authorities, combined with increasing homelessness and was described in the House of Commons as '[unsustainable pressure](#)' in January 2025. Government has agreed to create a [homelessness strategy](#) for England and the youth homeless sector is lobbying for the specific needs of young people to be included under the #YouthHomelessChapter campaign.

In a similar vein, much work has been done in Brighton & Hove under the Common Ambition project, to map pathways and bring together people with lived experience of homelessness, frontline providers and commissioners through co-production within homeless health services. A similar approach with the specific needs of young people experiencing homelessness is being advocated for.

3.4 Youth homelessness demographics

England data from the 2021 Homeless Link report 'Young and Homeless' provides the best national picture of young people experiencing homelessness:

- 52% are aged 18-21
- 72% are from the UK, with 4% from European countries and 8% from elsewhere
- 54% identify as female and 40% identify as male
- 64% have mental health problems
- 22% are people of colour
- 22% are care leavers
- 8% of LGBT+ young people are in generic accommodation – the charity AKT states that 24% of young homeless people aged 16-25 identify as being LGBTQ+

*All migrants with indefinite leave to remain, along with refugees and people under humanitarian protection, have a recourse to public funds. Some migrants with limited leave to enter or remain also have a condition related to public funds or accommodation specified.

Here are some trend headlines from desk research:

Headlines contributing to an increasingly underserved young audience



3.5 Changing drivers to homelessness

In order to better serve young people experiencing homelessness, we need to consider the circumstances that led to their situation.

The picture is also changing. Comparing the main homelessness drivers from the latest Centrepoint data to a 2015 insight report from The Sage Foundation [A Place to Call Home – Understanding Youth Homelessness](#) we see an increase in domestic abuse, eviction and landlords wishing to sell or re-let as key drivers and a significant decrease in family or friends providing accommodation.

Homelessness drivers – changes over time	Centrepoint - source: Gov FOI request 2023/4	Homeless Link 2015
Family or friends no longer willing or able to accommodate	50%	67%
Abuse or domestic violence	10%	9%
End of shorthold tenancy	8%	2%
Required to leave accommodation provided by Home Office as asylum support	6%	
Eviction from supported housing	5%	nil

Additional categories explaining the reasons why young people make contact with third sector homelessness organisations included mental/physical health problems (10%); Drug/alcohol problems (9%); Unemployment (7%); Leaving care (5%); Financial problems caused by benefit reductions (5%); ASB or crime (4%); rent or mortgage arrears (4%); other debt issues (3%) and end of social housing tenancy (2%).

3.6.1 The local picture

Brighton & Hove is a multiple university town; attractive by geography, tolerance and diversity. Whilst known for its strong and diverse Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise services and homelessness response, it is equally known for high rates of homelessness. As with national data, young people are typically hidden - rarely rising above 6% in rough-sleeping counts.

The just published [Health Counts](#) data set for Brighton & Hove tells us that in 2024, one in ten adults (9%) said they had self-harmed in the last 12 months, and this rises to 28% of 18-24 year olds. Further, in 2024, 21% of adults in the City are fairly or very worried about their housing conditions (higher in the most deprived areas of the city – 27%), and 85% of adults are taking at least one action due to the cost of living.

Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) restructured in January 2024 to flatten the organisational structure, removing and merging senior management roles in order to push decision making closer to the front line, with a saving of £1.2m reported by [The Argus](#).

Brighton & Hove is part of the government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), which means that elections for a Mayor for a strategic authority in Sussex are due to take place in May 2026.

The current Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping Strategy (2020-2025) has three broad objectives of prevention, intervention and sustainability and a new City Plan places an emphasis on prevention, with initiatives including a [homelessness hub](#) and an emerging Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping Strategy.

Brighton & Hove Common Ambition – a co-production project – designed a housing pathway map for the city, for a single adult with recourse to public funds. It explains many of the challenges faced for adults, which young people experiencing homelessness also face, in addition to the barriers outlined in this report.

3.6.2 System changes and the local response

The YMCA DownsLink Group Youth Advice Centre was historically commissioned to undertake housing assessments and casework for young people 16-25 years old. The centre acted as the 'front door' for housing and homelessness related enquiries, triaging a young person's circumstance and providing then advice, guidance and referrals to accommodation providers (both short and long-term) and offering support in securing homes in the Private Rented Sector as appropriate.

This 'front door' fed a service pathway for young people delivered by a close-working network of youth-specialised providers, operational in the city for over 15 years. More broadly it enabled young people to access advice and support on a range of topics (financial, emotional, well-being, education) that often intersect with homelessness and, when offered early, provide a preventative opportunity to avert homelessness and/or rough-sleeping.

From May 2024, this Youth Advice Centre housing service was decommissioned by the local authority and all housing assessments (the 'front door') were taken in-house by the local authority alongside older adults. A transitional arrangement between Youth Advice Centre and the local authority continued across 2024-2025 to support this change. This transitional period concluded in April 2025 with the statutory homelessness duties towards young people now being fully fulfilled through the housing options team at the Council's customer service centre based within Bartholomew House.

These system changes have impacted all parts of the youth homelessness pathway and required a re-positioning and change of offer from youth homelessness services within that pathway, in part this has been driven by young people establishing their own pathways – presenting at the

community points that make sense to them – and in part, it has been a proactive response of the partners involved to outreach to where young people are.

New operational spaces (the Youth Homelessness Operational Board) were created to support the operationalisation of these system changes and existing structures (the Youth Homelessness Working Group) were refreshed to ensure that the needs of young people were represented across key city strategies and remained within the eyeline of decision-makers.

This work is currently continuing and is the re-positioning of providers within the youth homelessness pathway. Alternative local authority funding through the Household Support Fund is enabling the Youth Advice Centre to deliver housing advice in the city until March 2026, reconfigured to focus on preventative upstream action to avoid young people needing to present at the council in the future.

The changes outlined here have also fostered a renewed drive for closer collaboration, not only amongst the partners of this project but across the wider stakeholder group who share a common interest in improving youth homelessness.

The impact of these changes upon young people remains unclear but numbers, young people and professional feedback points to a reduction in young people coming forward for support and there remains further work to be done. Amongst that there remain significant moving parts – both locally and nationally and at strategic, organisational and operational level – that will impact on how the future unfolds. Some present opportunities:

- An emerging new Brighton & Hove Homelessness and Rough-Sleeping Strategy and opportunity to do things differently
- The rollout of national initiatives at local level including family hubs
- Customer Service Centre delivery changes from May 2025 with Barts House now focused on housing services including through the 'Homelessness Help Desk' (previously named Housing Advice Drop-in) with the Customer Service Centre moving to other city sites including libraries

Some represent more challenges:

- A local authority that, like many, is experiencing profound financial pressures
- A council housing service that is experiencing significant pressures (resulting in a backlog of cases) with a recent recruitment freeze and changes to the directorate structure
- Changes to the national funding formula and (related to) the likelihood that the Household Support Fund is unlikely to be continued by national government.
- Broader funding challenges impacting the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector including shrinking grant and trust opportunities and a reduction in individual giving

The desire to accelerate a more coherent, collaborative and impactful response was a major driver for this 'Here for you' project and is intended to guide a way through uncertainties whilst building resilience and an improved offer to young people.

3.6.3 National and local data inconsistencies

Centrepont databank figures for 2023-4 are gathered through a compilation of official data and FOI requests, but Brighton & Hove figures for this period and all previous are based on the Youth Advice Centre as the 'front door' to young people for housing advice, referring only those eligible for council support to BHCC where they met priority need (approximately in 1:6 young people accessing Youth Advice Centre housing advice service).

This makes benchmarking Brighton & Hove against national figures or comparators difficult. It also demonstrates how data varies by geography and cannot necessarily be relied upon as accurate. For example, data on the .gov website conflicts with the data provided to Centrepont through an FOI request.

Statistics for Brighton & Hove + England, London and a comparator, Bristol: 2023- 2024 data from Centrepont FOI request

	England		Brighton & Hove		London		Bristol	
Asked LA for help	101,458		254		14,885		1,209	
Assessed	67,714	67%	200	79%	9,738	65%	1,146	95%
Offered prevention or relief duty	60,339	89%	200	100%	8,783	90%	1,044	91%
Successful duty outcome	24,360	40%	57	29%	2,623	30%	211	20%
Assessed under Housing Act 1996	16,984	25%	71	36%	3,230	33%	614	54%
Accepted as statutorily homeless (% of all assessed)	12,233	18%	68	34%	2,501	26%	524	46%
Unsupported	41,119	41%	54	27%	6,102	41%	165	14%

.GOV DATA
TABLE SAYS
THIS IS 177

SOURCE: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE SCALE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK, CENTREPOINT 2024

A more accurate local picture:

2023-4 data from the Youth Advice Centre shows that 604 young people sought housing advice from them. Around 100 of the young people assessed by the Youth Advice Centre were sent on to the council as they met priority need. So, taking Centrepont's figures above for those who asked their local authority for help, we know that approximately 154 young people approached the council direct.

9% of help-seekers were accepted as statutorily homeless. This compares to national figures of 18% of those seeking help from their local authority in England and 5% of all young people estimated to be homeless in England.



4. Findings

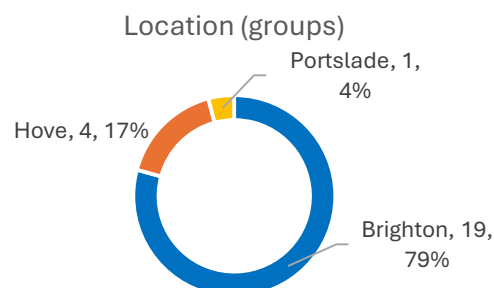
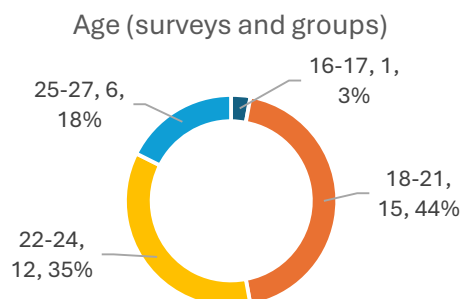
This insight used a mixed method, starting with desk research [spanning 22 reports and website scanning] in order to capture local and national insight and set the scene. It also informed survey and topic guide design.

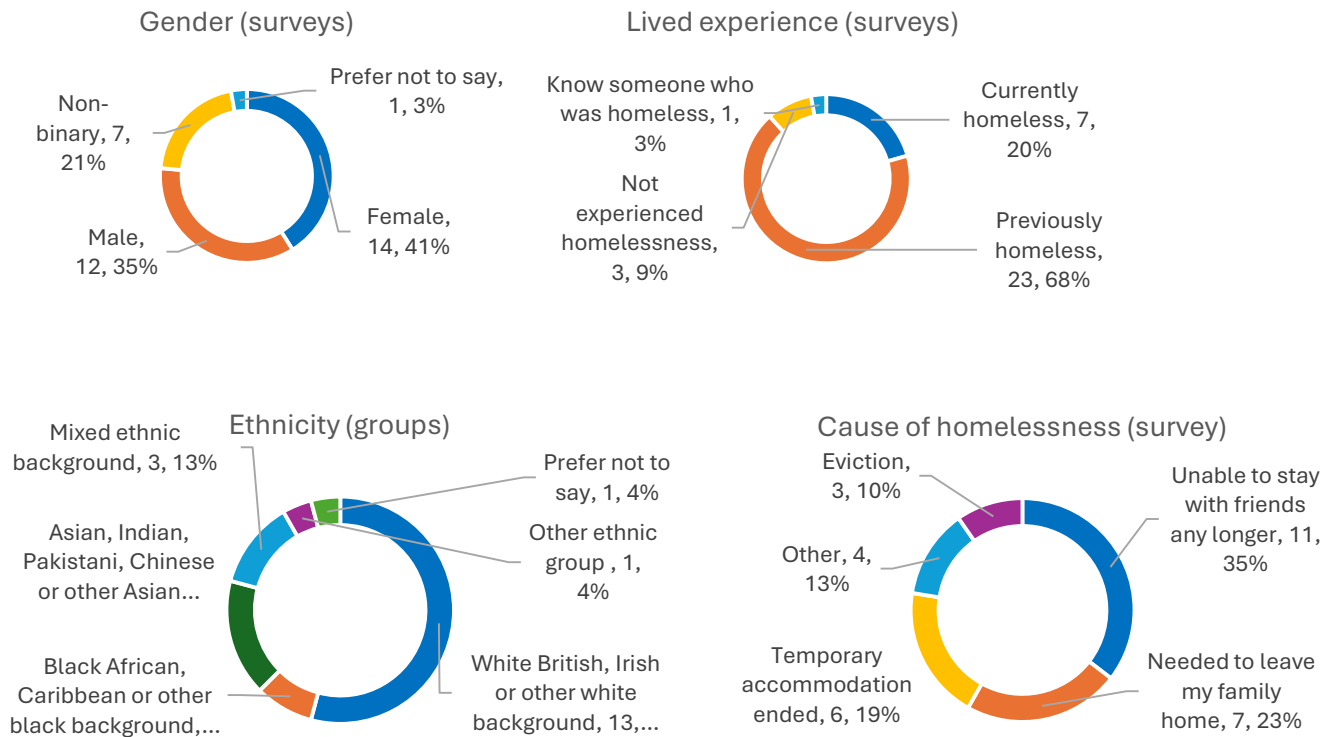
4.1 Method

We targeted young people from Brighton & Hove, aged 16-25 (+3 years) with lived experience of youth homelessness to share their views via three methods. 36 young people took part in our qualitative insight. We also consulted professionals.

- 34 via an initial online survey that sought to provide a local picture and benchmark awareness and perceptions, whilst providing a consistent recruitment method for qualitative group work and individual phone interviews. 65% opted into further insight. The survey was actively promoted by service leads at Clock Tower Sanctuary, Sussex Nightstop and the YMCA DownsLink Group, through the Youth Advice Centre and its supported accommodation services in the city. Some young people reportedly struggled with the survey 'wall of text' at Clock Tower Sanctuary and support workers invested time helping them to complete it. The survey outputs however were extremely useful and insightful.
- 22 young people attended a discussion group (one at Clock Tower Sanctuary and one at the Youth Advice Centre) and two young people were interviewed by phone – included within groups for reporting purposes as this covered the same topic guide. These sessions explored awareness, perceptions, needs and behaviours in more detail – and are reported alongside survey findings to enrich them.
- Two young people attended a group without completing a survey and 12 people completed the survey but chose not to opt into a group.

Different questions were asked within the survey and groups, to minimise questions and avoid duplication, whilst providing an accurate picture. The profile of respondents is shown as including all participants (survey and groups) or just one element.





Participants were representative and relevant. Interesting to note that two of the three people who stated they had not experienced homelessness would be defined by us as homeless. One was a refugee who 'had no home' and the other had been served notice from a property guardianship, so was approaching homelessness. These participants are also reflected in the 'other' category in cause of homelessness.

- 35 professionals working in youth and homelessness organisations were also consulted via an online survey and telephone interviews. Many of them also promoted the survey to young people, including BHCC, Arch Healthcare, Brighton Housing Trust, Brighton Youth Centre, Equinox, The Hangleton & Knoll Project, Impact Initiatives; Justlife; Sanctuary Housing; Tarner Community Project; Trust for Developing Communities and YMCA Brighton.

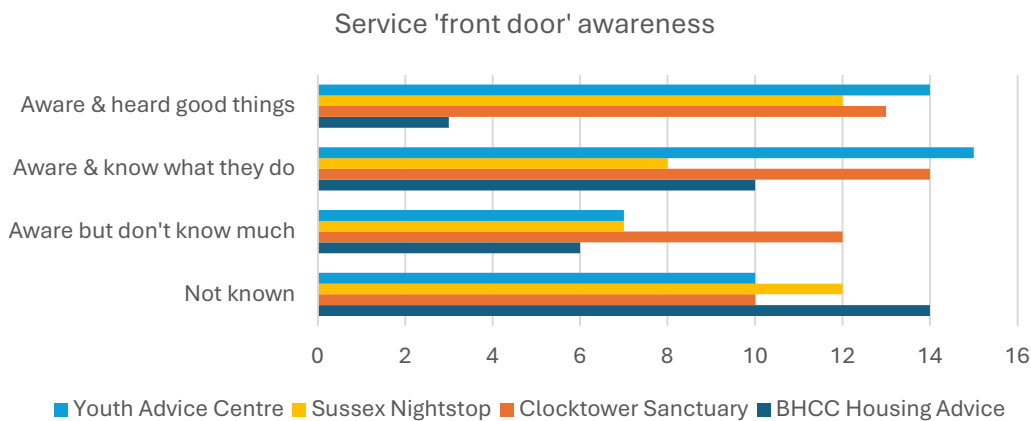
Professionals came from the organisations listed above and also Change Grow Live Esteem, Off the Fence, Sanctuary Supported Living and the Youth Advocacy Project.

The findings are presented from the young person's perspective and interspersed with feedback from professionals and desk research insights.

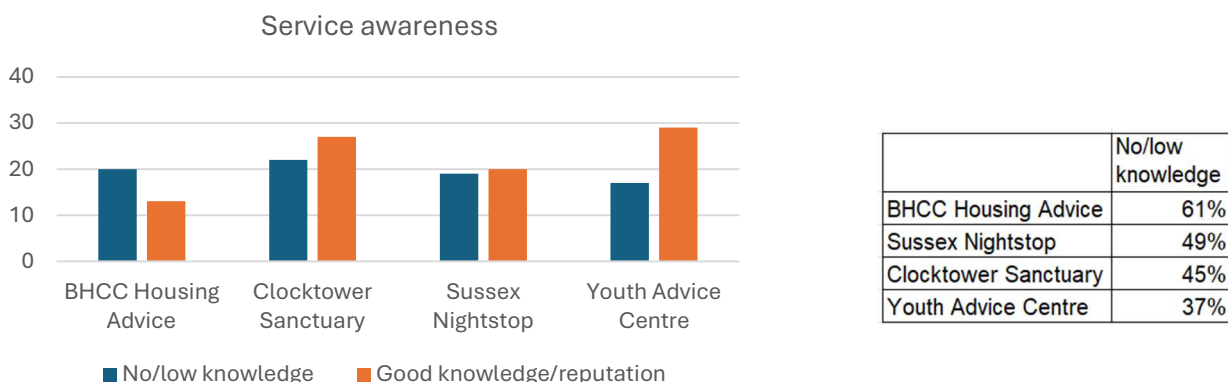
Charts are used to illustrate strength of feeling and to help prioritise themes, but the numbers are too low to be statistically robust. Please view them as indicative, not absolute.

4.1 Service awareness

58% of participants were aware of BHCC housing advice, whereas the 'front door' services for youth homelessness were known by 70-80%, along with the Youth Employment Hub. Of course, there is bound to be a bias towards the Youth Advice Centre, Clock Tower Sanctuary and Sussex Nightstop given that most participants were recruited via these services.



However, if we distil the answers further, there is no or low knowledge among a large proportion: just under half for the Clock Tower Sanctuary and Sussex Nightstop and 38% for the Youth Advice Centre. 57% had low or no knowledge of BHCC housing advice. Our aim is high awareness and a good reputation for all.

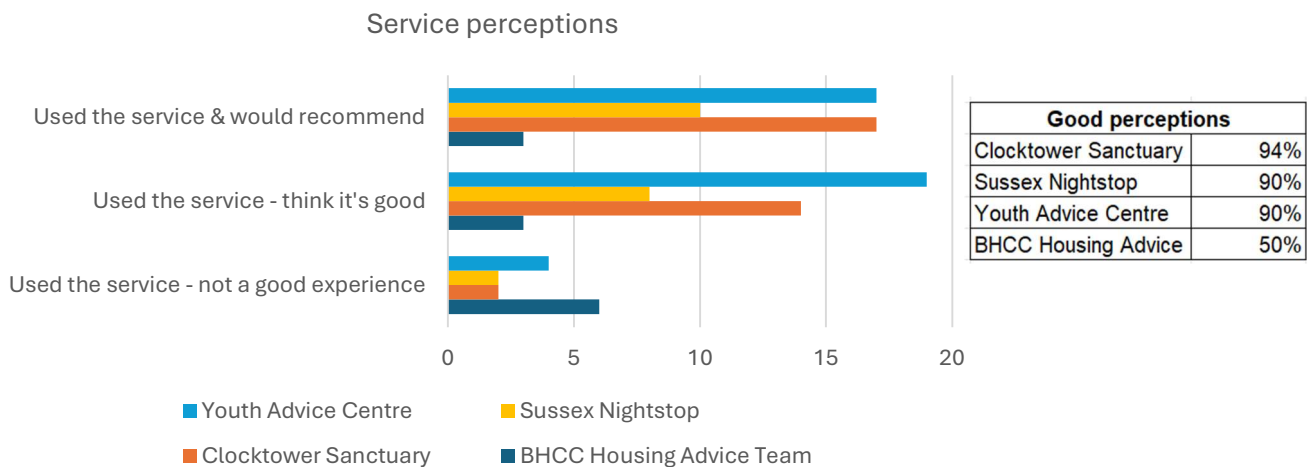


83% to 95% of youth/homeless service professionals were aware of the 'front door' services. Everyone but one person had a good working knowledge of the Clock Tower Sanctuary and low or no working knowledge of the other 'front door' services for youth homelessness ranged from 6% to 19% with the lowest knowledge being around BHCC housing advice. Low or no working knowledge of other youth services ranged from 29% to 72%, demonstrating the need for better information provision across services, who are well-placed to recommend.

Knowledge of youth-specific outreach services was the lowest – both among young people and professionals. This matches the relatively low numbers rough sleeping within the overall homeless population.

Given the importance of recommendation for services, we also wanted to know how services were perceived. Whilst only a few people had used outreach services, no one reported a bad service experience. The Youth Advice Centre had the highest volume for service use and Sussex Nightstop

had the highest percentage of service users who would recommend it. All three 'front door' services would be recommended by 81% to 83% of service users, whereas the council's housing advice would be recommended by just 40%.



Again, if we distil responses down into a bad experience or a good one, there would be a high propensity to recommend the youth-specific 'front door' services, but the council is less likely to be recommended. Desk research suggests that the factors influencing this might be:

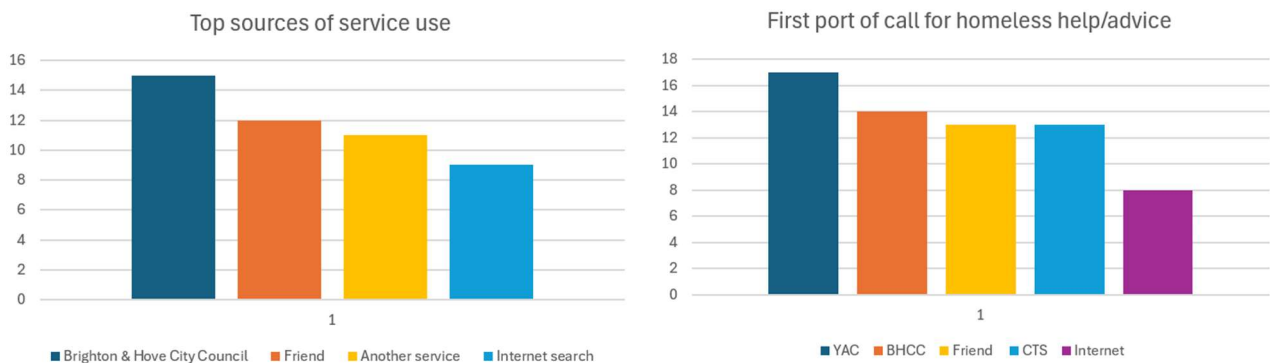
- Slow service response vs urgent need [crisis] when all other options have been exhausted
- Mistrust based on previous interactions with the council
- A stressful assessment process perceived as officers wanting to 'catch you out'
- An uncomfortable, unwelcoming environment that's not conducive to disclosure

Desk research says:

- Low service awareness & access knowledge exists among young people.
- A wide range of information sources is used, with friends highest of all.
- Ethnically diverse young people in Brighton & Hove had an awareness of 39% for housing, money and benefits services (TDC, Oct 24).
- There is a need for clear signposting, but funding reductions has led to service gaps - less time in the system for collaborative working and service shortages, whilst patchy data prevents learning and progress.
- New Horizon Youth Centre in London is an exemplar and 42% of referrals come from friends or word of mouth recommendation, whereas 16% are referred by another service. 12% come from the local authority. Half of their homelessness service users haven't contacted the local authority.
- 86% of website visitors search for New Horizon Youth Centre by name, suggesting that the centre's success has been driven by service user experience and volume over time, alongside collaborative working practices.

The council is the top source of service information, followed closely by friends, another service and Internet search. 'Front door' services dominated service recommendations but there was a long list of information sources discussed in focus groups.

The Youth Advice Centre, council and Clock Tower Sanctuary were considered the first port of call for homeless help and advice.



We delved deeper into recommending a service in the focus groups and people were most likely to recommend a service they'd used, which included the three 'front door' services and also Migrant Help and The Hummingbird Project. The council was the second most mentioned and the Internet third.

YOUNG PERSON

CTS is a good place to go because they can get food and help getting back into housing. Being fed means spending less money.

YOUNG PERSON

YAC. They can support people in whatever way they need. They're aware of services and able to refer.

YOUNG PERSON

Friends are the best source if they have experience.... a positive service experience carries weight.

YOUNG PERSON

I wouldn't send them to the council - it can be very stressful. I was worried I was going to say something wrong.

4.2 Service promotion

We explored how they would search for a service in groups and interviews. Four themes emerged, listed in order of frequency:

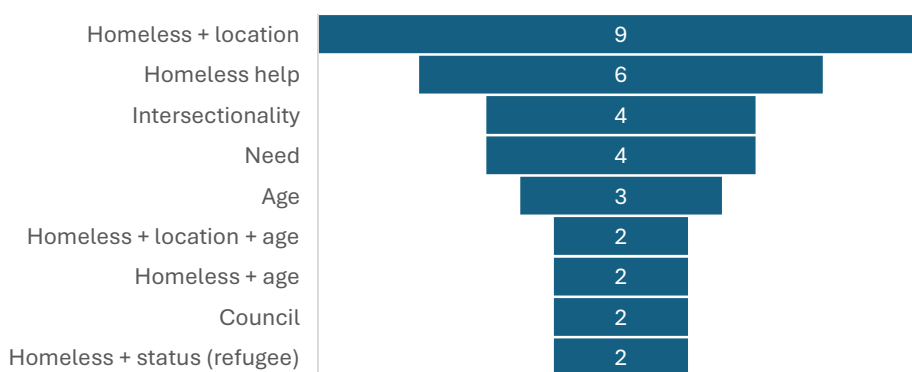
- Posters and leaflets in community spaces like the library; universities; cafes e.g. The Queery - Kemptown <https://thequeery.co.uk/>; hubs and in shops e.g. co-op
- Internet search – often for research before visiting; Facebook groups for support, finding accommodation, service reviews; looking at reviews and comments about a service
- Recommendation – e.g. a GP support worker, friend networks
- The council

YOUNG PERSON
I tried to deal with it all myself.
I didn't want anyone to know.

YOUNG PERSON
"I didn't believe it was happening – a friend just dragged me around to various places"

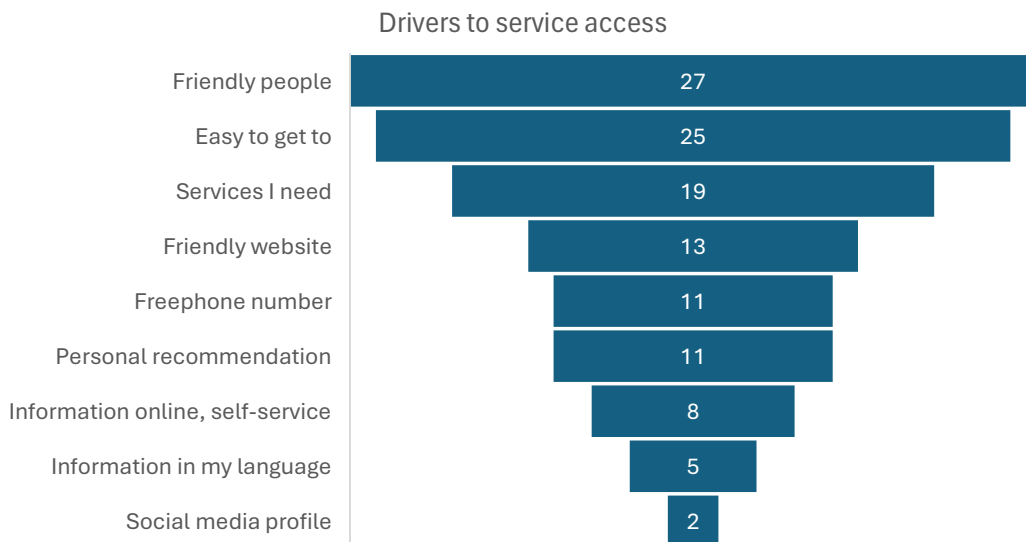
We also asked participants to mention or write down search terms they would use. Homeless search terms dominated, unsurprisingly, with wide-ranging search behaviours providing clear categories to focus on. Questions + location should be considered alongside word combinations when evolving SEO. Intersectionality search terms included LGBTQ, mental health and neurodiversity.

Search term themes (groups + survey)



4.3 Drivers and barriers to service access

Friendliness is the biggest driver, with location and provision important too. Other mentions included clear, accessible, easy to understand language and phrasing. Few people answered the subsequent question on language, with all but one citing English as their first language. The other language was Arabica.



We discussed what encourages people to access a service in discussion groups and interviews. Most views centred on service approach:

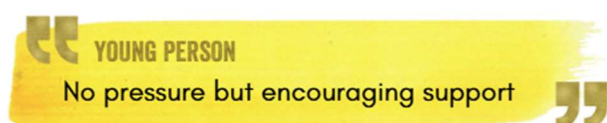
- trauma informed
- knowledgeable
- non-judgemental
- non-discriminatory
- accessible
- inclusive
- person-centred

Other things mentioned were:

- access to practical help e.g. showers, food, clothes
- recommendation from a trusted adviser like a social worker or Youth Advice Centre mentor

We also discussed what encourages them to take up a service offer, rather than walk away.

- The biggest theme was people. Friendliness and kindness were recurring words. Welcoming, trustworthy, informal were also mentioned. Staff continuity or communication around changes is valued too.
- The second theme was place. Easy to access, free, walk-in spaces where you feel safe.
- The third theme was support, described as being able to provide it (this links with comments around availability and making it clear on websites whether the service is open and available) and it being productive (which links to a need for relevant testimonials on websites and social media)/
- The other two themes were a connected service offer and a wide range of services e.g. showers, free food, clothes washing, advocacy.





YOUNG PERSON

You feel anxious, vulnerable, not sure what to expect. Need to establish a sense of trust.



YOUNG PERSON

Nice people keep you going back



YOUNG PERSON

A bridge out of a service, not a cliff edge.
A collaborative approach is best.



Professionals had similar answers to this question, with a lot of answers around **people & relationships**, as well as **place** (accessibility and environment). The descriptor used most frequently among professionals was **'building trust'** which fell into eight themes:

- Working together beyond signposting
- Clear information and the right language and tone
- A successful first encounter and service use [leads to peer recommendation]
- Being youth-specific and trauma-informed
- Peer recommendation, inter-service knowledge and linking
- Clear expectations and being adaptable to the needs of young people
- Holistic support, working together, avoiding duplication
- Frontline workers trusting another service to deliver [& testing]



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Understanding fully what is being offered, a single point of contact who can adapt to the young person's needs, services that are flexible and person centred (including meeting referees where they are, e.g. in their homes)."



Other themes, in order of importance, were:

Service knowledge

- Service outreach to help frontline workers understand service offers and how to refer: in person and online.
- Relationship-building between frontline workers.
- Knowing services well enough is linked to trust and propensity to refer.



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Better links between services. Better knowledge of other services across Brighton & Hove. For a young person, better signposting from services. A package of support.



Necessity

- Urgent need was recognised as a driver for some young people, with a crisis as the starting point for service access, described nicely as the “emotional weight of motivation”. One professional asked the question that underpins this insight “How do we get messages in earlier so we can help before it gets to that point?”

Fit for the individual

- Some professionals answered that the needs of each young person determine the right service to refer to, but that requires sufficient information from the service to do so.

Advocacy

- Some professionals felt that hand-holding into a service is the answer. Seeing the process through with them.



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

We need a whole person approach. There's an inbuilt anxiety engaging with services – for everyone, not just young people. It's more intense for them. So the step change is a trusted somebody that provides the pathway into a service.”



Desk research cites barriers to service access as:

- Unrealistic demands to provide evidence of homelessness.
- Young people want to be close to their education or work setting and friends – concerns over poor quality accommodation; living in a ‘rough’ area and having to accept the first offer.
- Youth-specific services are needed and a one-size-fits-all approach cannot work for such a complex and diverse group of vulnerable young people.
- Too many 16-17 year-olds are not assessed or housed under the right legislation; not given accurate information about their rights and not given access to an advocate or legal aid, leading to uninformed decisions that can have a huge impact on their lives. A lack of suitable placements and other resources (budget, staff) may influence local authority decisions about whether to accommodate children under section 20.
- A sense of hurt and anger at the perceived betrayal by the family and society. This also impacts trust of help offered by others, resulting in a high value placed on self-sufficiency. Adolescents would seek help from people whom they perceived to be genuine, caring, trustworthy, empathic and capable of containing their distress.
- Gender bias – higher standards and service engagement expected from young women than men, and greater pressure on young women to repair fractious family relationships, even when unsafe.
- Long waiting lists and services not offered at times that work for the young person.
- Increasing demands on services vs diminishing supply of affordable accommodation, compounded by landlords unwilling to let properties to people on housing benefit.
- Council resourcing issues, resulting in a low knowledge of the voluntary sector offer.
- Being turned away by a housing team with little explanation of why and little or no support to help them address their homelessness.

- Barriers can be exacerbated by the diversity of young people experiencing homelessness and the high prevalence of multiple disadvantage, combined with a lack of funding and services. An equity scoping report summarised barriers as:
 - Lack of trust (most prominent)
 - Language & communication barriers (English-speaking and deaf)
 - Cultural barriers (stigma in communities regarding mental health, family expectations, and a lack of cultural awareness in services)
 - Discrimination (including fear or expectation of encountering prejudice, racism, transphobia or other forms of discrimination) – insight from AKT states that 43% of young trans people who accessed support from a local authority or charity when homeless said they had experienced discrimination or harassment due to being transgender.
 - Psychological barriers (a lack of confidence in approaching services, concerns about confidentiality, or fear of the consequences of getting help)
 - Physical & travel barriers (due to disability, geographical remoteness, isolation in rural areas, cost, or danger)
 - Inadequate provision (shortage of specialist services, high thresholds for access, a lack of coordination between services and poor transition arrangements)
 - Service experience (feeling poorly understood by services and negative experiences of staff)
 - Lack of awareness (including awareness of rights and entitlements, of services, and of how to access services)
 - Digital exclusion (young people with disabilities, young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and young refugees and asylum seekers, are disproportionately affected by a lack of access to devices or confidential spaces to use them, or a lack of digital skills)
 - Invisibility (marginalised groups are often invisible within datasets, meaning their needs go 'under the radar')

Ideas to improve awareness from both surveys and groups included:

- Multiple hubs at youth touchpoints across the city
- More outreach including colleges and schools
- Outreach to migrant hotels
- Brochures for the council to give out at housing appointments
- Information in more places, in different areas. Leaflets and postcards were discussed and in general there was a need to balance useful information with minimal content, for simplicity. Testimonials are important. Locations suggested in groups included:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ○ Afrori | ○ Job Centre/DWP |
| ○ AKT | ○ Junk Food Project |
| ○ BMEYCP | ○ Ledward Centre |
| ○ Brighthelm | ○ Social clubs |
| ○ Brighton Care Collective
https://www.achetogether.org/carecollective | ○ St Anne's Day Centre (St James St) |
| ○ Clare Project https://clareproject.org.uk/ | ○ Switchboard |
| ○ Colleges and unis | ○ Tarner Project |
| ○ CTS | ○ Train station |
| ○ Esteem counselling | ○ Village food bank
https://bhfood.org.uk/directory/the-village-food-bank/ |
| ○ Friends in exile/Voices in exile | ○ Youth Advice Centre |
| ○ GP surgeries, pharmacies, | ○ Youth Employment Hub |
| ○ Hub areas | ○ Youth groups in Whitehawk |
| ○ Hummingbird social club | |

We also discussed messaging in the groups, with the two most important themes identified as inclusivity and being encouraging and supportive.

Examples of inclusivity:

- The people [in service] have lived experience and it's a queer-friendly place
- Explain what inclusivity and accessibility there is
- Disability friendly
- Inclusive + services = reassuring
- Non-vocal communications
- Trauma/neurodiverse aware

Examples of an encouraging and supportive approach:

- Don't be shy. We can help.
- Patient, trusting, caring
- We care about and advocate for all young people who come through our doors
- Text light, with more info available e.g. help filling out forms



YOUNG PERSON

It can be embarrassing...your brain is growing.... It can be a struggle. 1000 different emotions going on at the same time.



Other lesser themes around service messaging were:

- Service offer descriptions e.g. ways of moving on from supported housing. Not just ethos.
- How things are labelled - accessibility, amenities, services e.g. Neurodivergent-friendly, 16-25, offers food, advocacy, signposting, showers, social groups, advice, toiletries, casework, safe space.
- Person-centred approach – for example, one sentence to sum up our offer – we'll hear your needs and adapt to them. Trauma-informed, supported as an individual.

Desk research cites drivers to service access as:

- Be on our side. Listen. Sympathetic hearing
- Advice they can understand (low knowledge of entitlements to support and don't know the process, the system or next steps)
- Clear signposting, easy access (don't know what to do / where to go - easier to put it off)
- A consistent response (perceived as unfair - race and gender play a role)
- More support post 18 (currently diminishing)
- Solutions to the local connection barrier to support
- Help with more than housing to rebuild their life e.g. jobs, education, emotional and mental health support
- Reassure: Trust. Safety. No judgement. Person-centred, respectful, hopeful, kind, practical help, putting your needs first - We'll see you. We'll hear you. And we'll help you.
- Conveying a complicated and inconsistent system coherently (visually)
- Help to maintain or return to work or education

Professionals were also asked how we can better inform them for signposting purposes. Most felt that there were networks and newsletters to tap into.

NETWORKS



- Youth providers meetings
- Youth grants meeting
- Supported Accommodation Forum
- Homeless Operational Forum
- Youth Services Network
- Refugee & Migrant Forum
- Young Homeless Working Group meeting
- Hostel Managers Meetings
- Supported Accommodation Panel
- School networks
- Youth Workers network
- Street Support
- B&H Frontline Network
- Rough Sleeping Network
- B&H Faith in Action
- Temp accommodation action group
- Multi-agency homeless health forum
- Leaving Care teams
- Youth Offending Team

PLACES



- Places of education
- Library
- Street sheet
- The right environment at the council

ADDITIONAL COMMS



- A stand-alone newsletter
- Flyer/poster
- Targeted to services by topic e.g. only send Arch Healthcare health-related comms
- Training
- Getting together
- Street sheet for young people online & print
- Care Leavers Service info & advice map

EMAIL UPDATES



- first.base@bht.org.uk
- Community Works
- Justlife newsletter
- Youth Grants News bulletin

OTHER THINGS



- An accredited immigration advice for young migrants
- Translation services for non-English speakers
- A focus on prevention
- A change management plan



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

We've got to act now. This is an issue that's not going to go away....things are only going to get worse. If we continue to work in silos, nothing will improve. Whilst we have our own contracts to protect, we have to work better together, or we're letting down an entire generation of young people.



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Context for this is the key: if the collaboration is set up effectively, it makes everyone's job easier. For example, we work with school nurses to provide additional support they can't offer. It needed an initial investment to make that happen and 18-24 month plan. This has increased referrals.

DESK RESEARCH: SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE SERVICE ACCESS

- An 'Ask Frank' for homelessness
- Service promotion via education settings
- Better signposting to local services
- Youth hubs
- Service promotion that grows public awareness (family/friends the main source of info)
- Services that enable easy phone and text contact (preferred to online/email)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Brand awareness work needed to support word of mouth as the largest source of leads – educational institutions a priority for this. Test other options in insight phase to establish importance/priorities and segmentation.
- Evolve partnerships across the Local Authority, NHS & third sector networks in key contact points, especially to address staff changes, where service knowledge is lost. Invest in navigator functions.
- Enable consistent, complete and accessible information for young people.

4.4 Service experiences

We listened to good and bad service experiences - and there were many more good than bad.

A GOOD SERVICE EXPERIENCE

good listeners
kind
no judgement
reassuring
welcoming
consistent response
helpful
no pressure
practical help
safe
well connected to other services
clear signposting
hopeful
informative
know the system and can help me navigate it
plain speaking
putting your needs first
trustworthy

A BAD SERVICE EXPERIENCE

unwelcoming
unfriendly
unwilling to help
repeated visits providing paperwork
lack of understanding about inter-sectionality
lost paperwork

“ YOUNG PERSON

Unfriendly, don't want you there, not giving you space to talk about what's happening, no passion, no desire to help. ”

“ YOUNG PERSON

Evening sessions more accessible - having a night-time crew like Nightstop on-call. Night-time can feel more anxious. ”

“ YOUNG PERSON

Anxiety drives panic. Help with planning manageable actions. ”

“ YOUNG PERSON

Listened to - not forced to say things. ”

Professionals also had very few bad service experiences to draw on. Two services were mentioned:

BHCC housing advice

- Place isn't something that young people feel comfortable coming in to and long waiting times are off putting
- Incorrect signposting
- Lack of clarity between BHCC and Youth Advice Centre functions

“ YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Lack of clarity with "who does what" between the Housing Advice BHCC team and YAC. They will often send young people in crisis to YAC, the pathways of the new model don't always work well. ”

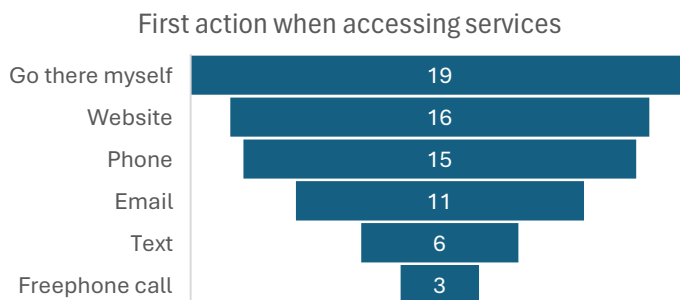
Youth Advice Centre

- One instance with a refugee but practices perceived now better for young people where English is a second language.
- Problems accessing Youth Advice Centre support if not referred by the appropriate organisation.

4.5 Accessing a service

Going to a service in-person was most popular, with viewing a website often an additional action. Only five people selected a more remote first contact like email or text. Phoning was chosen over going in-person by just six respondents, with the rest combining this with going in-person.

Text or email was preferred for people where English isn't the first language.



4.5.1 Improving access

Better websites were called for in the survey and groups. We asked groups if an 'Ask Frank' for homeless information locally would be useful and the answer was resoundingly yes, but it's important to note that websites are often consulted as a prelude to a visit. They should be considered as an integral part of the customer journey. Ask Frank is well known, well used and prolific on search. It's considered the authority on drugs – helpful in that you can do your research in the way you wish e.g. find out about effects/mixing. Website improvements included:

- More information including longer opening hours, overnight services, free hot evening meals, older age provision
- Services like CV building / work coach / caseworker; housing support; life skills e.g. cooking; boxing classes, table tennis, showers. Chillout spaces.
- Information in different languages or provide a translator
- The Council is the default if you don't know anywhere else
- A step-by-step process online
- Bullet points including criteria
- Live non-verbal chat services, people you can message, and clear information on what's needed from the person and what's offered
- Clear location instructions
- Contacts, descriptions, location.
- Welcome different identities and demonstrate how you meet service needs
- Mobile-friendly, not too wordy, accessible, with a call option and quick exit option
- Don't use chat bots
- Encouraging words to overcome psychological barriers

- Storytelling - follow a person's experience and outcomes. Video stories. Use actors or focus on body or animation. Personal stories were well liked and relatable.
- Website better than app – storage limitations
- Better SEO for easier search
- More on social media too – most participants used social media but when looking at services, mainly for reviews. We discussed the use of TikTok for search but only one person used it for its ease and simplicity.
- Here for You was considered a good message vs something practical like Homeless Help
- There was some discussion around service availability, with clarity on this very important and linked to trust. Being clear on what we can help with, as well as what we can't, is important.

CASE STUDY: MAKING A YOUTH PORTAL WORK - LONDON YOUTH GATEWAY

New Horizon Youth Centre set up a London portal – London Youth Gateway – ten years ago. Comprised of seven partner organisations, it had a central point of access managed by Depaul, who provided advice & triage. Main learnings are:

- Central point of access only works when controlled by one organisation, not shared among a group of services
- GDPR compliancy is an issue – each partner has a different CRM
- Funding needs to include signposting and promotion

4.6 Segmenting young people to improve relevance and targeting

In groups, we discussed age, situation and need as the key things arising from desk research.

Theme 1: Age

This generated the most discussion. A younger age has less lived experience and is considered less open to help, meaning that more encouragement is needed. Opinions ranged from younger people being more questioning, to them being closed and less likely to ask for help.



YOUNG PERSON

16-18 is very different to 18-25 – younger = more worried, family related, more comfy language that encourages you to seek help. More emotional. More about help, taking the reins. Give you the feeling that they will hold your hand. When older, more factual – collaborative, we'll do this together. 16-19 considered younger. Reassuring. It's going to be alright."



YOUNG PERSON

Age is important. Similar messages but anyone under 18 simplify it and enable immediate contact so they can reach out faster"



Conversely, when speaking to adults, they want relevant messaging that respects their life experience and responsibilities:



YOUNG PERSON

Treat us like adults who have autonomy – don't speak to us like a child.



Other age-related suggestions were:

- Ensure testimonials cover all age ranges – truthful reviews, not just the positive, not sugar-coated
- Age is not relevant to a service promotion or description – best to explain the service consistently
- A lot of regulations linked to housing so it's easy to misunderstand but it can be overwhelming.
- If you're younger, needs-based might be more appropriate. Services are right for individuals.
- Photos should be realistic.

Theme 2: situation.

- Refugees define their status in this way. Instead of housing, they want help.
- A need to balance – listening and action, at pace with the person.



YOUNG PERSON

To reach out and find the root of problems, whilst providing solutions, as immediately as possible. "Sometimes you need to help with finance or food, then help with other stuff later."



- Group services based on need and identity
- Encourage others not to give up – testimonials that are age-related useful here

Theme 3: needs

- Food came up most, with people searching for free food and food banks, as well as clothes washing.
- A list of acronyms was advised e.g. SWEP – Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, which provides accommodation for rough sleepers in extreme weather

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORTING YOUNG WOMEN: HOMELESS LINK

- Championing specialist roles and engendering a strengths based, trauma-aware and person-centred approach
- Small caseloads enabled more meaningful relationships between staff and young women, and therefore the quality of the support that could be provided
- Service location - proximity increases the chances of service engagement
- Timing and availability - the right level of support at the right time
- Partnering with gender-specific services and other services to address intersectionality

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE OF COLOUR: TRUST FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES (TDC)

- Inclusive, diverse staff
- Case studies from staff and service users that are relevant and relatable
- More welcoming services and an informal environment
- Outreach via churches and mosques
- Safe, low-pressure and casual places like BYC
- Websites specifically saying that ethnic people are welcome
- Service promotion in multiple formats, at multiple places, with confidentiality emphasised
- A hub for young people to get help with housing, employment, and cost of living issues and share positive youth stories like getting out of debt, to counteract negative narratives.
- Celebrate difference and promote diversity
- Free and accessible community spaces and more youth workers in schools
- Increased training for service providers to combat ingrained cultural stereotypes
- More community events that showcase creativity, promote intercultural engagement and bring diverse communities together.
- Culturally competent foster carers and social workers from diverse backgrounds.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANS YOUNG PEOPLE: AKT & HOMELESS LINK

- Creating a safe and inclusive environment
- Use of names and pronouns; not making assumptions around gender identity
- Visual cues and inclusive communication e.g. such as representative posters and the inclusive pride flag
- Challenging transphobia
- Confidentiality - asking young people how they'd like their name and pronoun to be shared
- Anticipating young people's needs and connecting them supportively with specialist services
- Recognising intersecting identities

On the same topic, we asked professionals: Do you feel that young people would be best served with service 'packages' that meet their needs? [For example, with family breakdown the main cause of homelessness, many will need housing advice, accommodation, advocacy and mediation, though they probably wouldn't describe it that way.]

Everyone agreed that this was the best approach, with some stating a one stop shop as the ideal.



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

I think a wrap-around concept where they can engage with all that support through one 'offer' would be beneficial. Ideally located in one space where possible



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

A coordinated package of support would be better than sending young people from service to service.





YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

That would be helpful – simplifying offers – knowing there are different offers out there. Sometimes young people get fixated around getting housed, but that's in the heat of the moment. Sometimes family situations can be rectified. They just don't know how to deal with things at that time.



Suggestions from professionals to improve collaboration centred on getting together, with 86% recommending it as the better option, though it's only realistic if adequately resourced.

- Relationship development - especially among frontline workers
- Multi-agency meetings, case work, reviews, info-sharing (Multi-disciplinary Teams)
- Co-location
- Ad-hoc conferences/meet ups/online meetings/open days to reflect on challenges and discuss strategies
- Joint training, action learning sets
- Drop-ins at venues where clients attend e.g. First Base
- Improve professional understanding of other services aims
- A young person specific mental health service
- Having in-reach social workers and mental health specialists within the services
- Ensure we capture youth voice with lived experience and act on it



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Joint training, action learning sets, co-location, getting service user voice to analyse closely where the services 'drop the ball'.
Try and avoid pointless 'signposting' with no handover or accompaniment of the client to the next service."



YOUTH/HOUSING PROFESSIONAL

Increased co-location. BHCC organisational culture isn't able to adapt to difference, but if those with the right experience are co-located, it will lift the offer dramatically. Experts together. Far more training. As a system we need more standardisation of approach and skills.



Other themes included:

Funding

- Lack of transition support
- Resource as a barrier to collaboration

Online

- Cross-service information sharing hubs
- A web portal

4.7 Prevention

Desk research points to preventative work upstream as more cost-effective than responding to the needs of young people at crisis point.

DESK RESEARCH: SOLUTIONS TO INCREASED PREVENTION

- Schools & mediation services are key
- Services to support young people to remain in their family home
- Services to prevent young people from losing their tenancies
- Services to prevent rough sleeping
- Improved information and advice around rights, homeless pathways and services
- Early prevention officer or homeless reduction caseworker in LA
- Social housing 'sustaining tenancies' team
- More hosts for supported lodgings
- Asylum/refugee charities focused on prevention
- Better national data to inform system and service improvements

PREVENTION CASE STUDY

Upstream Scotland Pilot Evaluation (Feb 2025) is a homeless prevention initiative in secondary schools that seeks to identify young people aged 14-16 at risk of homelessness earlier on, enabling targeted support. Key findings from the pilot:

- Implementing the survey in schools was challenging, with optimal success derived from delivery in PSHE lessons with teacher guidance. Survey uptake was good, despite the topic sensitivity
- Analysis revealed that one in ten young people were at risk of homelessness, evidenced by lower levels of resilience and wellbeing. It is noteworthy that almost three quarters identified at risk remained engaged with school.
- Half of young people offered support accepted it.
- Widening out the focus from young people to encompass their families would be a strong fit with the existing evidence on the importance of family conflict as the main trigger to youth homelessness.

OTHER PREVENTION INITIATIVES

- Herefordshire County Council has a dedicated 'early prevention' officer for community engagement
- Sunderland City Council has a homelessness reduction caseworker role in the hospital and a Sustaining Tenancies Team within social housing
- St Basils' Positive Pathway of support & multi-agency youth hubs. The Birmingham hub received 2,534 approaches for help in 2022-3 [For comparison, 6,291 people in total approached the Local Authority for help and 954 were aged 16-24, so the LA coverage of young people was 38%]
- Supported lodgings – Lancashire based SLEAP who hosted 53 young people in 2023-3 with their main capacity issue being host shortages
- Nightstop as a national movement
- An asylum/refugee charity working on homelessness prevention

DESK RESEARCH: SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVED PROVISION FOR 16-17 YR OLDS

- Early intervention and holistic support for families
- Mediation
- Timely and accessible mental health services
- Early identification and support for mental health issues
- Joined up services: mental health, housing and social services
- Mental health assessments for all children at risk of homelessness
- Better data collection to improve understanding and improvements

5. Reference sources

1. DLUCH Questionnaire 2020 – initial findings
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd8e3a18fa8f54d60878af7/Initial findings from the rough sleeping questionnaire access.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fd8e3a18fa8f54d60878af7/Initial_findings_from_the_rough_sleeping_questionnaire_access.pdf)
2. Failure to act: the scale of youth homelessness in the UK, Centrepont, 2024
[Failure to Act - The scale of youth homelessness in the UK - Databank Report.pdf](#)
3. A Place to Call Home, Sage Foundation, 2017
[FULL-REPORT.-A-Place-to-Call-Home.-Understanding-Youth-Homelessness.pdf](#)
4. Research on core homelessness and homeless projections, Heriot-Watt University Commissioning (for Crisis), 2021
<https://researchportal.hw.ac.uk/en/publications/research-on-core-homelessness-and-homeless-projections-technical->
5. The Prevalence of Rough Sleeping and Sofa Surfing Amongst Young People in the UK
Clarke et al, 2016
<https://www.cogitatiopress.com/socialinclusion/article/view/597>
6. On Our Side: Improving Services for Young People Experiencing Homelessness, New Horizon Youth Centre, 2024
<https://nhyouthcentre.org.uk/learning/on-our-side-march-2024/>
7. Failure To Act: The Scale of Youth Homelessness in the UK, Centrepont, 2023
<https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/Failure%20to%20Act%20-%20The%20scale%20of%20youth%20homelessness%20in%20the%20UK%20-%20Databank%20Report.pdf>
8. Local Authority Gatekeeping: Briefing, Centrepont, 2024
<https://centrepont.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-10/Local%20authority%20gatekeeping%20briefing%20-%202024.pdf>
9. Tackling homelessness: Fourth Report of Session 2024–25, House of Commons
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/46302/documents/233214/default/>
<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmpubacc/352/report.html#:~:text=The%20MHCLG%2C%20which%20is%20responsible%20for%20tackling%20homelessness%2C,1.5%20million%20new%20homes%20during%20the%20current%20parliament.>
10. Out of Service: A Report Examining Local Authority Expenditure on Youth Services in England & Wales, YMCA England & Wales, 2020
<https://ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/YMCA-Out-of-Service-report.pdf>
11. Health Counts: Brighton & Hove Wellbeing Survey 2024
<https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Health%20Counts%202024%20summary.pdf>
12. Brighton & Hove Common Ambition, 2022

The Big Hub Idea - bringing people together

<https://www.bhcommonambition.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Prototype-Route-To-Roof.pdf>

Housing Pathway for a single adult with recourse to public funds

<https://www.bhcommonambition.org/resources/#housing-pathway-map>

13. York University: Ending youth homelessness: Possibilities, challenges and practical solutions
Fitzpatrick et al, 2011

<https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2011/EndingYouthHomelessness.pdf>

14. Youth Homelessness in Austerity Britain: "We Can't Help You, You Need to Go Back Home"
2021

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/0145935X.2021.1913049?needAccess=true>

15. Door is Still Closed, Coram, 2024

https://www.coram.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Coram_HomelessReport_Digital.pdf

16. Psychological Help-Seeking in Homeless Adolescents, International Journal of Social Psychiatry,
2009

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26317762_Psychological_Help-Seeking_in_Homeless_Adolescents/citation/download

17. The Statutory Homelessness System in England: A Fair and Effective Rights-Based Model?
Fitzpatrick et al, 2012

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233047337_The_Statutory_Homelessness_System_in_Engl_and_A_Fair_and_Effective_Rights-Based_Model

18. Young and Homeless in 2020, Homeless Link

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Young_and_Homeless_2020.pdf

19. Young and Homeless in 2021, Homeless Link

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Young_and_Homeless_2021_Final2_copy.pdf

20. Prevention into Action, Homeless Link, Dec 2024

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Prevention_Into_Action_research_report.pdf

21. Equity Scoping: Addressing inequity in service provision and experiences for young people
facing marginalisation, Youth Access, 2024

[Addressing inequity in service provision and experiences for young people | Youth Access](#)

22. A Travesty of Justice? Young People's Access to Legal Aid Policy & Research Briefing, Youth
Access, 2018

<https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/files/a-travesty-of-justice-yp-access-to-legal-aid.pdf>

23. Supporting children aged 16 and 17 who need help when they are homeless, Ofsted, 2025

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/good-decisions-supporting-children-aged-16-and-17-who-need-help-when-they-are-homeless/supporting-children-aged-16-and-17-who-need-help-when-they-are-homeless>

24. How Homeless Services can be More Inclusive and Support Young Trans People, AKT and Homeless Link, 2024

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/Supporting_young_trans_people_in_homelessness_services_HkEagip.pdf

25. Learning from organisations on supporting young women

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/learning-from-organisations-on-supporting-young-women/>

26. Youth Voices: Improving Access to Youth Support Services in Brighton & Hove for Ethnically Diverse Young People

Trust for Developing Communities, 2024

<https://www.trustdevcom.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Youth-Voices-Report-Oct-24-v2.pdf>

27. Upstream Scotland Pilot Evaluation, Interim Report, Rock Trust, 2025

<https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Upstream-Scotland-Pilot-Evaluation-Interim-Report-with-Exec-Summary.pdf>

28. The Big Ambition, Children's Commissioner, 2024

<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/the-big-ambition/#downloads>

29. The Journey Home, Justlife, 2016

https://www.justlife.org.uk/assets/documents/the-journey-home_report_Dec2016-1.pdf