



Depaul UK's Manifesto Briefing

April 2017

Depaul UK is calling on all political parties to commit to ensuring that **no young person sleeps in an unsafe place.**

Each year more than 80,000 young people experience homelessness.ⁱ Homelessness puts young people in dangerous situations and leaves them unable to fulfil their potential.ⁱⁱ The number of people aged 16 to 25 sleeping rough in London has doubled since 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ

Last year Depaul UK worked with 3,000 young people across the country who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The below recommendations are based on our experience of delivering services to these young people.

To help make sure no young person sleeps in an unsafe place, parties should commit in their manifestos to:

1. **Invest in services that prevent young people from becoming homeless**
 2. **Make sure that people who are homeless get Universal Credit when they need it**
 3. **Ensure supported housing funding is secure.**
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1. **Invest in services that prevent young people from becoming homeless in the first place**

Short-term, preventative interventions can help young people to remain in their family home or find alternative accommodation before they reach crisis point. Avoiding the human and financial costs of homelessness benefits young people, their families and the public purse.

The Homelessness Reduction Bill, which will shortly receive Royal Assent, places new duties on local councils to prevent homelessness. Emergency hosting and family mediation services would help councils to meet these new duties. At a time of tightening local authority finances, the new Government should provide seed funding to enable councils to set up these services.

In emergency hosting schemes, volunteer hosts give young people who need a roof over their head a free warm bed and a meal for a few nights. While the young person is staying with a host, the issues that put them at risk of homelessness can be addressed and longer term accommodation can be found.

Depaul's **Nightstop Network** accredits emergency hosting schemes in the UK. Accredited schemes have rigorous vetting and risk assessment procedures in place. In 2016, Nightstop services provided 12,134 bed-nights to 1,390 young people. In too many places, however, young people are unable to access Nightstop. Currently less than half of the local authority areas in the UK are covered by a Nightstop service.

Family mediation services help young people and their parents to tackle issues that can lead to a young person leaving the family home. Family mediation, if entered into at an early stage, often enables young people to remain with their parents. It can also help young people who are homeless to rebuild supportive relationships with their parents.

In one area a Depaul family mediation service prevented 62 young people becoming homeless over the course of a year, leading to an independently estimated average saving of £9,493 per young person.^{iv} Despite these benefits, few areas are covered by a family mediation service.

2. Make sure that people who are homeless get Universal Credit when they need it

The roll-out of Universal Credit could help young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to move into and stay in work, as well as develop budgeting skills. **A major flaw in the design of the benefit, however, is resulting in young homeless people having to wait at least six weeks for their first payment.^v During this time they cannot pay rent, often have to rely on food banks to feed themselves and may get into debt that they struggle to pay off.**

This delay before the first payment was justified by an expectation that people will save enough money while in work to see them through a period of unemployment.

Young people who are or become homeless rarely have any savings to fall back on. Many have not worked or have not earned enough to build up savings.

The next Government should take urgent action to address this problem. **The length of time that it takes for people who are homeless to receive their first Universal Credit payment should be reduced to as short an amount of time as possible.**

3. Ensure supported housing funding is secure

Young people who are homeless need a roof over their head. Many also need assistance to address the problems that led to them becoming homeless and to avoid becoming homeless again. Supported housing provides safe accommodation and enables young people to tackle these problems.

A wide-ranging Government review of supported housing funding has taken place and a consultation on various reforms has been published. It is crucial that the next Government listens to supported housing providers before making any changes.

Supported housing keeps some of our most vulnerable young people safe and off the streets. **If rushed or ill-thought out reforms are undertaken, there is a risk that services become financially unsustainable and thousands more young people find themselves forced to sleep in an unsafe place.**

ⁱ Clarke, A., Burgess, G., Morris, S. and Udagawa G. (2015) Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK, Cambridge Centre for Housing and Planning Research, University of Cambridge http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/Estimating-the-scale-of-youth-homelessness-in-the-UK/Report/copy_of_Full-Report

ⁱⁱ Depaul (2016) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/danger-zones-and-stepping-stones>

ⁱⁱⁱ See CHAIN data at <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports>

^{iv} Insley, E., Insley Consulting and Depaul (2011) Homelessness prevention: Can we afford not to? <http://www.insleyconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Homelessness-Prevention-final.pdf>

^v Examples of young people we work with relying on food banks, running up arrears and getting into debt are contained in Depaul's submission to the Work and Pensions Select Committee's recent inquiry into Universal Credit, available on request.