

Homelessness

A significant problem for young people

Homelessness has a serious impact on every aspect of the life of a young person. Many describe their lives as being 'on hold' while they are homeless, making it much harder for them to achieve their goals and ensure their own well-being. Young homeless people can lack confidence, motivation and a sense of purpose which not only negatively affects their mental health but leads to an apathy in seeking help and caring for themselves.

"Young homeless people often do not consider their health and well-being to be a problem or priority for them."

Other issues such as the need for housing and employment are far more pressing. Many young homeless people go to desperate measures to avoid sleeping rough, including committing crime or resorting to sex work to get a roof over their head. Drug, alcohol abuse and violence can sometimes become part of a homeless young person's life. Apart from the obvious issues around eating well, getting enough sleep, keeping warm and dry, violence, risk of exploitation and harm are real dangers.

Homeless people often face multiple health problems and those with mental health problems are particularly at risk. Homeless people face great inequalities in accessing mental health services, yet their mental health often suffers as a result of being homeless.

"The biggest cause of homelessness for young people is being told to leave the family home by their parents."

Other common causes are leaving care and being unable to pay rent. Many do not have a network of support and both mental and physical health can suffer.

There are an estimated 2,300 young runaways in Essex*. Young homeless people are considerably more vulnerable than the overall homeless population. Up to half of single homeless young people have been in care, 40% have experienced abuse at home and 33% self-harm. Leaving home before you are 18 is a serious step and should not be taken lightly. Think about involving a mediator or social care professional to help you talk to your parents or carers to see whether things can be sorted out before you get to this stage.

* Essex Needs Assessment for Schools, Children and Families

Sources: www.homeless.org.uk www.crisis.org.uk

Where can I get help?

If you're under 16 and having serious problems at home, contact children's services at your local council. They'll try and help you sort things out so you can stay at home. If you are aged 16 or 17, you are normally entitled to housing and support from your local council. In most cases, it's the social services department that has to take responsibility for finding you somewhere to live.

You are entitled to register with a GP when you are homeless. You can do this using a temporary address, such as a friend's place or a day centre. You can find a GP in your area through NHS Choices or by calling the NHS helpline on 111.

There are also specialist medical centres for people who are homeless or sleeping rough.

Key findings YEAH! Report 2014 - 2015

- Long waiting times lead to a lack of timely care which is especially vital in this group who often seek help, particularly for mental health issues, at the point of crisis.
- Appointments are often short and with different healthcare professionals meaning issues are not fully addressed and young people often have to recount distressing personal stories repeatedly.
- Lack of money to attend appointments is a particular issue due to the transient nature of the lives of the young homeless population.
- Chaotic lifestyles can lead to challenges with continuity of care, keeping appointments and following healthcare recommendations.