



Response to Children in Wales/ Wales UNCRC Monitoring Group call for evidence

Homelessness is a major issue in Wales, with a significant impact on children. International research and insights from frontline services show that children and young people experiencing homelessness have a different pathway into homelessness and distinct needs, which require specific youth-oriented solutions to enable them to exit homelessness. Following extensive consultation with agencies across Europe, including Welsh organisations, FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, have recently defined youth homelessness as:

*“Youth homelessness occurs where an individual between the age of 13 and 26 is experiencing rooflessness or houselessness or is living in insecure or inadequate housing without a parent, family member or other legal guardian”.*¹

End Youth Homelessness Cymru is a national coalition, led by Llamau, determined to end youth homelessness within 10 years; a mission we believe is both vital and achievable. We believe that every young person should have a safe place to call home with the support needed to leave homelessness behind and lead a happy, fulfilled life. We aim to create the systemic and cultural change necessary to prevent and end youth homelessness in Wales.

Young people experiencing homelessness are at a key developmental period. They often have no experience of independent living and lack the resilience of adulthood. Some will have involvement with youth-specific systems, notably the care system, which increase their risk of homelessness. For all of these reasons, youth homelessness requires a distinct approach from that taken to combat adult homelessness.

Of the 31,170 presentations from households seeking support with homelessness, or the risk of homelessness, in Wales last year (2018-19) 732 were by 16- and 17-year olds.²

Research shows that in a sample of homeless people in Wales, 48% first became homeless before the age of 21.³ Further, 73% had been homeless more than once, showing that once you become homeless once, it is likely to recur. This shows that to build on the response to homelessness during COVID-19 it is necessary to intervene early and prevent children and young people from becoming homeless.

Specific, evidenced recommendations for policy changes which will positively improve children and young people’s lives follow. These span a number of the priority areas highlighted in the call for evidence, such as:

- Care Experienced Children (see below and the attached report, *Don’t Let Me Fall Through The Cracks: Homelessness amongst Care-Experienced Young People in Wales*)

¹ https://www.feantsa.org/download/framework-for-defining-youth-homelessness_final_pdf3614092469143708469.pdf

² <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Housing/Homelessness/Statutory-Homelessness-Prevention-and-Relief/householdsforwhichassistancehasbeenprovided-by-outcome-age-gender>

³ Mackie, P. (2014), *Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain*. Accessed at: https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20608/crisis_nations_apart_2014.pdf

- Non-Discrimination (LGBTQ+ young people are disproportionately affected by homelessness, see below and the attached report: *Out On The Streets: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales*)
- Legislation and Strategy (our recommendations below set out key components of a Welsh Government strategy to end youth homelessness in Wales which we view as a necessity).

Article 27 (adequate standard of living) of the UNCRC states: “Every child has the right to a standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and social needs and support their development. Governments must help families who cannot afford to provide this.” That children in Wales experience homelessness means that, as a country, we have progress to achieve in order to meet our obligation to our children and young people.

Recommendations:

The next Welsh Government should publish a strategy for ending youth homelessness in all its forms, as can be found in the Irish Programme for Government.⁴ This should focus on effective early intervention and prevention – treating homelessness like a public health emergency to address its earliest symptoms.

Universal prevention⁵ should be a principle focus, so we ask that, specifically, the Welsh Ending Youth Homelessness Strategy should tie in with a comprehensive and renewed Child Poverty strategy, an issue at the root of much youth homelessness.⁶ Social deprivation is associated with enduring, complex physical and mental health problems for children, young people and their families.⁷ These issues are, in turn, linked to homelessness.

Continuing the theme of universal prevention, the Welsh Government needs to address housing quality, affordability and availability for young people (including children with young parents or young people who are moving on from care). The United Welsh/ Llamau Youth Housing Choices model⁸, based on NAL (the Finnish Youth Housing Association)⁹, which is funded by Welsh Government, needs to be evaluated and, if it can be found to meet the needs of young people, swiftly delivered at scale across Wales. We want the next Welsh Government to set out a new vision for housing for young people, which reflects what young people say they need and affirms a legal commitment to a human right to adequate housing. This vision should include:

- An increase in affordable accommodation designed specifically for young people and planned for in the Local Authorities’ Local Development Plans.

⁴ Irish Government. *Programme for Government – Our Shared Future* 2020 Pp61. Accessed at: <https://static.rasset.ie/documents/news/2020/06/draft-programme-for-govt.pdf>

⁵ Fitzpatrick, S., Mackie, P. and Wood, J. *Homelessness prevention in the UK Policy briefing* CACHE, 2019. Accessed at: <https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Homelessness-Prevention-in-the-UK-Policy-Brief-July-2019-final.pdf>

⁶ Bramley and Fitzpatrick (2017), *Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?*, Accessed at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02673037.2017.1344957?scroll=top&needAccess=true>

⁷ Lund C, Breen A, Flisher A, Kakuma R, Corrigall J, Joska J, et al. *Poverty and common mental disorders in low and middle income countries: A systematic review*. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2010;71:517-28 Accessed at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20621748/>

⁸ Price, J and Russell, H. *Youth Homelessness: Moving Towards Prevention*. WCPP 2020. Accessed at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/commentary/youth-homelessness-moving-towards-prevention/>

⁹ Schwan et al (2018) *Preventing Youth Homelessness: An International Evidence Review* WCPP 2018. pp14-15 Accessed at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Preventing-Youth-Homelessness-full-report.pdf>

- To facilitate an effective response to young people in crisis, the strategy should set out that all young people will be considered in priority need, when presenting as at risk of homelessness.

- New minimum standards of temporary accommodation, agreed in consultation with young people, and a commitment to dramatically limit the length of time that any young person should be expected to remain in TA. (for more on this, please see the recommendations in the attached, as yet unpublished, End Youth Homelessness Cymru report: “Don’t Let Me Fall Through The Cracks: Homelessness amongst Care-Experienced Young People in Wales”. Please consider the additional recommendations included in this paper, which provides evidenced recommendations to address care-experienced young people’s disproportionate likelihood to experience homelessness, as part of this exercise).

There should be significant support for targeted prevention, building on interventions that are proven to work (e.g. school-based intervention, such as Upstream Cymru, a Welsh pilot of the uniquely effective Australian model, the Geelong Project, which achieved a 40% reduction in youth homelessness).¹⁰ As with other innovative approaches based on successful models imported from abroad, the Welsh pilot must be evaluated and implemented rapidly and at scale, if demonstrably effective in a Welsh setting.

The strategy should also clearly set out commitments to ensuring Wales-wide access to demonstrably effective, youth-focussed, crisis prevention interventions, such as Family Mediation and Supported Lodgings. Responses to the specific needs of those at greatest vulnerability to youth homelessness will need to be laid out within the strategy (e.g. housing related support for care-leavers, ensuring Wales-wide availability of LGBTQ+ focussed projects, specific responses for those who have experienced trauma).¹¹

Emergency prevention, i.e. support for those young people at immediate risk of homelessness, especially sleeping rough, needs to be incorporated into a future strategy. Specifically, this means significant investment in additional Housing First for Youth in Wales. We are seeing a number of successes from early pilots of the model in Wales (based on the demonstrably effective Housing First model) and a recent study of a Scottish Housing First for Youth pilot confirms its suitability for application at scale in the UK.¹²

Welsh Government must also ensure provision is made available for recovery prevention, i.e. prevention of repeat homelessness. In the wake of COVID-19, young people are predicted to bear the brunt of associated economic hardship. Many young people in Wales at greatest risk of homelessness (care-leavers, for instance) are also ‘at the back of the queue’ for employment. The next Welsh Government should urgently:

- Deliver a Wales-wide supported job-guarantee scheme (an existing model, Llamau’s Symud Ymlaen/ Moving Forward project could provide the blueprint).¹³

¹⁰ Schwan et al (2018) *Preventing Youth Homelessness: An International Evidence Review* WCPP. Pp33-34
Accessed at: <https://www.wcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Preventing-Youth-Homelessness-full-report.pdf>

¹¹ Russell, Bridgeman, Jenkins (2019), *Out on the streets: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales* End Youth Homelessness Cymru, accessed at: <https://www.llamau.org.uk/out-on-the-streets>

¹² Blood, Alden, Quilgars (2020), *Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Pilot: Evaluation Report*. Rock Trust.
Accessed at: <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HF4Y-Evaluation-Report-July-2020-Final.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.llamau.org.uk/symud-ymlaen-moving-forward>

- Address the welfare issues which negatively affect the abilities of some young people living in supported housing to work.
- Increase and protect traineeship funding to enable young people to achieve qualifications.

Ends

Contact

To discuss these recommendations further, please contact Hugh Russell, End Youth Homelessness Project Manager on: hughrussell@llamau.org.uk

Accompanying Material

Please find attached to this submission two papers:

Don't Let Me Fall Through The Cracks: Homelessness amongst Care-Experienced Young People in Wales (due for publication in 2020)

Out On The Streets: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales (2019)

Please feel free to use the recommendations in these papers, or refer to the case studies provided, as you see fit.