CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Working with young people who are affected by homelessness

Introduction

You may be a youth worker who is working with a young person who has been or who is currently affected by homelessness. You may also know of a young person in your community that is at risk of homelessness, who could benefit from your support.

Young people's journeys through and out of homelessness typically involve a range of events and experiences that extend beyond housing. A mixture of personal, social, educational, familial and economic transitions affect and 'shape' a young person's experience of homelessness[i]. In this chapter we bring attention to how youth work can respond to the complex needs of this group. We present demographics in relation to homelessness as well as explaining the current policy context on youth homelessness. We also explain the varying needs and issues that young people may face and offer practical advice on working with young people who have been, or are currently, homeless or are at risk of homelessness. It concludes with a list of resources that will help you in your work.

Terminology

The ETHOS definitions of homelessness

Whilst there is no universally accepted definition of homelessness, FEANTSA[ii] advocates for a broad understanding which encompasses rooflessness, houselessness and inadequate and insecure housing.

FEANTSA has developed ETHOS, the European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion, in order to provide a common framework through which to discuss homelessness. It attempts to cover all living situations which amount to homelessness or housing exclusion:

- ➤ **Rooflessness** (people living rough and people in emergency accommodation);
- ➤ **Houselessness** (people in accommodation for the homeless, in women's shelters, in accommodation for migrants, people due to be released from institutions and people receiving long-term support due to homelessness);
- ➤ **Living in insecure housing** (people living in insecure tenancies, under threat of eviction or violence);
- ➤ **Living in inadequate housing** (living in unfit housing, non-conventional dwellings or in situations of extreme overcrowding).

ETHOS has been translated into most EU languages and is being used and accepted by more and more governments, researchers and organisations throughout Europe.

Demographics and Profile of Youth Homelessness

Census 2016[iii] provides the most recent census data with age breakdown of people experiencing homelessness (see graph). Between March 2015 and March 2019, the number of homeless families has grown by 268%, with one in three people in emergency accommodation being a child[iv]. While the majority of homeless families are
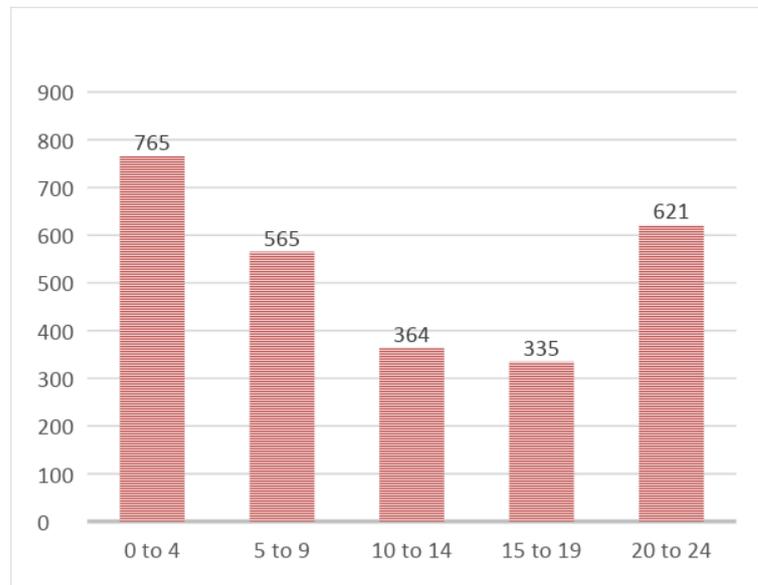

Figure 1 – number of young people homeless by age – 2016 www.cso.ie

located within the greater Dublin region, the crises has extended well beyond the capital and rates of family homelessness have more than doubled in less than two years, increasing from 165 in January 2017 to 436 families in March 2019, (with a total number of 1,733 families, including Dublin)[v].

In March 2019, there were over 888 young people aged 18-24 living in emergency homeless accommodation. This represents a 73% increase from March 2015[vi]. However, this number does not include 'hidden homelessness' which refers to people who are living in squats or 'sofa surfing' with friends.

Young people as the hidden homeless

Until recently, a remarkable feature of policy responses to adult homelessness is that the specific **situation and needs of homeless young people** – different to those of older adults and families - have not been specifically or comprehensively addressed[vii] and as such their presence and needs have been hidden from the policy agenda. **Youth homelessness** has now been identified as a separate area of policy concern reflecting work undertaken by the Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (2019)[viii] in response to the rise in youth homelessness.

There is little reliable information about young people who are 'officially homeless'. The Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness has identified three broad groupings, acknowledging that there is no information about the size or dynamic of each group:

- ➢ Young people who grew up in the care system, and who are in receipt of full welfare payments but unable to secure accommodation.
- ➢ Young people with limited or no links to the care system and who are on reduced rate welfare payments.
- ➢ Young people who are parents and are accommodated as the parent in a 'homeless family'.

Less is known about young people who are not included in the official figures but are considered
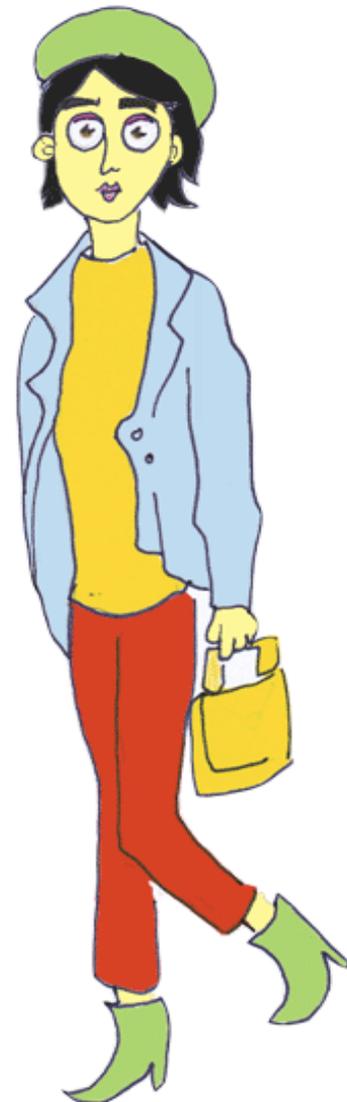
homeless under the internationally recognized ETHOS typology[ix] (those sofa surfing, squatting, living in overcrowded accommodation, precarious situations or sleeping rough etc.). International evidence suggests that a higher proportion of homeless young people are likely to be 'unofficially homelessness' than is the case for older homeless people[x]. Moreover, of all age groups, young people are the least likely to present to services or even know where or how to get help.

Young people with families in emergency accommodation

Young people who are homeless with their families will most likely be housed in emergency accommodation. This includes hotels and family hubs. Some hotels are used exclusively to house homeless families while other have a mix of commercial use and homeless accommodation. These are primarily for families but can be provided to single people if they have special medical or social needs depending on availability. Bed and breakfasts are also used for families and individuals but they may be required to book the bed and breakfast accommodation on a night by night basis

Family Hubs

Family hubs are used for families with children experiencing homelessness and offer on-going placement that a hotel might not provide. Hubs also have separate bedrooms and may have spaces for play and homework. Hubs either provide a communal kitchen or meals.

In addition to accommodation support children under the age of 5 whose parents are homeless (or homeless transitioning to permanent accommodation) get 25 hours of childcare free a week. This includes 15 hours

of free pre-school, and a daily meal. Public transport is also free to those living in emergency accommodation to cover school journeys and family travel[xi].

Hostels as an emergency accommodation response

The most common places used for emergency accommodation for single people or couples are hostels. These can be used for long or short term, and some provide meals and other services. While there is a charge for most hostels the local authority can waive the fee on a case by case basis. Some people can be placed in a hostel on a night by night basis, they may also get a rolling booking on a weekly basis. A rolling booking is when the booking continues for a certain period until the hostel is told otherwise. Some hostels also provide 3 month placements, these are known as Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA). They provide workers to support the residents to transition out of homelessness.

The issue of homelessness amongst young people from the Traveller Community

The issue of homelessness for members of the Traveller community has grown as they continue to experience significant marginalisation in the area of accommodation. Within the community there are families with children growing up in homelessness, often living in temporary accommodation, secured on a day by day basis which is impacting on their sense of belonging and identity.

Family life is severely compromised where the focus of the parents is on securing accommodation with little space left over to support the emotional well-being of their children. Homelessness is becoming a way of

life for some, working against the bonds and support of the extended family.

Homelessness affecting young Travellers

The age of maturity can differ substantially for some members of the Traveller community. Young Travellers of 15 or 16 years will often take on adult responsibilities and included in this is a responsibility to find housing. Within the context of the current housing crises, this places an extra burden on young Travellers. In addition, poor mental health is one of the key issues for young Travellers with suicide rates being six times higher amongst Traveller men than in the general population with 65% of it occurring amongst those aged 30 years and younger (See chapter four on working with young Travellers). The factors that can lead to a young Traveller taking their own life are important in the context of a focus on homelessness.

In addition, cultural shame in terms of sexual orientation, drug use, and psychiatric illness are believed to be key issues impacting significantly on homeless risk for young Travellers.

The following section will help you understand the complexities involved in working within this context and the issues that are involved in supporting a young person who has experienced or is at risk of homelessness.

Needs and issues for young people affected by homelessness

When you consider being homeless as a human experience, it raises a series of complex and often interrelated issues.

➢ Uncertainty

➢ Isolation

➢ Experiences of trauma

➢ Lack of privacy

➢ Rejection

➢ Chaos

➢ Lack of security and safety

➢ Vulnerability to crime

Many young people who are homeless live with some or all of the above.

In addition, experiencing homelessness can relate to other mitigating life factors including food poverty[xii], access to adequate health services and participation in education[xiii]. Recent work has raised issues concerning the effects of homelessness on children and young people's' capacity to engage in school, educational outcomes and development[xiv]. Moreover, the current phenomenon of homelessness is having a detrimental impact on children's participation and development of their rights[xv].

Needs and issues of young people affected by homelessness are further varied according to circumstance and age. Youth workers in many youth services have participants in their groups and programmes who are currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Some of the needs and issues encountered by youth workers are identified below:

Needs of under 18s:

➤ Young people may require early intervention to support their emotional and physical well-being i.e. some youth services are targeting their funding to include working with under 10s living in emergency accommodation or in overcrowded accommodation.

➤ Similarly, for others, because of the precarity of their homeless circumstances, they may not be attending school. Access to spaces to support their emotional and physical development is also critical for this group of young people.

➤ Having access to a space to do homework can be a key need for a young person i.e. some emergency accommodation locations don't have any space appropriate for homework. In addition, some homes are so overcrowded that there are not enough chairs for all the family to sit on and no quiet space for individual needs e.g. homework, emotional well-being.

➤ Some young people may be going through the difficult transition of leaving their home together with their family, thereby facing uncertainty, including a possible change of school. Maintaining an

ongoing relationship with a youth service during this transition can be a crucial stabilizing influence on that young person's life.

➢ Access to food that has a nutritional value is an identified need for young people in emergency accommodation and who are homeless more generally.

➢ Space to play, getting involved in activities and maintaining a social and community bond with other young people is critical for young people experiencing homelessness.

Needs of over 18s:

➢ For young adults, overcrowding can be a significant issue, particularly in urban areas. This will affect people differently, depending on circumstances:

- For young mothers who are homeless and can't afford to rent, they may be caught in overcrowded accommodation at their 'family' home or alternatively in emergency accommodation. Their support needs include mental health support, dealing with the day-to-day reality of the insecure nature of their accommodation and the uncertainty of their future, while trying to provide security for their family unit.

- For other young adults, though they may not be homeless on the street, they may be living in an overcrowded space with other adult siblings and no access to privacy or adequate living space.

- For some young people who identify as LGBTI+, they may not feel safe in confiding in their family and feel that they have no option but to become homeless[xvi].

➢ Others may be sofa surfing to avoid difficulties at home, including overcrowding or they may have experienced violence in the home. For such young people, recognizing themselves as homeless can be an unidentified need.

➢ Some young people, including those from a migrant background, may have limited or no links into support services and may also experience cultural barriers to identifying as homeless.

➢ Young people living in hostels need different kinds of support including a safe space to socialise and interact with others. In addition, access to ongoing wider supports and services can be a challenge for young people in hostels.

➢ Some young people may opt to live on the streets rather than in a hostel where they may not feel safe. In addition, there may be no available emergency accommodation as is the case in some parts of the country.

➢ For some young adults looking to register as homeless, navigating the pathway to access services can be daunting. Access to homeless or housing services may also require transport to a different town, (particularly outside urban areas) and the cost can be prohibitive.

Another aspect of this phenomenon is that young adults out of home are in crisis and lacking experience of independent living. There may often be a wide range of additional needs and issues, stemming from adverse childhood experiences, including poor mental health, behavioural problems, problematic drug or alcohol use and often all in combination. Those leaving State care or detention,

those from migrant or ethnic groups, including from the Traveller Community or those who identify as LGBTI+, are disproportionately represented among this group.

Stigma associated with homelessness

Despite the escalation of homelessness and its effect on a broad range of people in our communities there is still a stigma associated with homelessness. Stigma can be a powerful tool of exclusion and prejudice and the fear of being stigmatised may prevent people from coming forward and seeking the help they need.

Stigma is associated with the following false assumptions:

- ➢ All homeless people are rough sleepers.

- ➢ All homeless people are drug addicts or alcoholics.

- ➢ It is the person's own fault that they ended up homeless.

- ➢ Most homeless people have a mental illness.

- ➢ Some people are not deserving of a house.

Associations between stigma, discrimination and social exclusion act as major barriers to:
- ➢ participation,
- ➢ health,
- ➢ well-being,
- ➢ inclusion and
- ➢ quality of life outcomes.

Homelessness as an internalised stigma

Many young people do not identify themselves as homeless. Having a roof provides access to basic shelter, yet, in an overcrowded living environment, in emergency accommodation and/or where sofa-surfing is an accommodation strategy, young people can be resistant to seeing themselves as having a housing need.

In many cases, young people who are homeless are attending school and youth services and continuing to interact with other young people through social media etc. Continuing such relationships is important to their sense of self and personal dignity but maintaining relationships can put extra pressure, stress and shame on a young person who may not want to reveal their living situation[xvii].

The lack of a stable home raises questions of belonging and community for young people e.g. "how do I stay connected with my community of friends/neighbours if I don't have a regular place to call home?". These questions impact on the mental health well-being of young people and add to the stigma of homelessness.

Young people leaving the care system

For young people leaving the care system, the transition to independent living often requires specific supports; the risk of homelessness arises where the young person cannot secure accommodation or where they do not have the

life skills to manage in their own accommodation. In addition, children in care almost always experience significant educational disruption, trauma and neglect of some kind, creating an academic and psychosocial skills deficit that can take years to address. They may often lack a social support network and positive role models[xviii]. Some key issues identified by for young people leaving care include:

- The lack of adequate preparation (e.g. no aftercare plan in place, no allocated aftercare worker).
- The inconsistent provision of aftercare services throughout the country.
- Homelessness or risk of homelessness.
- Access to ongoing education or maintaining an educational pathway[xix].

Young people involved in the Juvenile Justice System

For young people involved in the Juvenile Justice System, including Garda Youth Diversion programmes, criminal or anti-social behaviour is often interpreted by youth/community workers as symptomatic; and not the problem itself. There are a number of factors that make up the typical profile of a young person in the Juvenile Justice System, just as there are a number of factors that increase the likelihood of young people becoming involved in crime (**see chapter 8, 'Working with young people in juvenile justice'**).

Homelessness is one of these factors. Research looking at risk factors related to youth crime identifies several features, which potentially increase or decrease the

likelihood of offending behaviour. Stealing to meet daily food needs is one area where young people can get a 'criminal' label. Where youth workers often have good relationships with Community Gardai, they can help to mitigate outcomes for the young person where the crime might be to meet a basic need.

Timely support can help young people overcome problems and build resilience; such as, supporting the development of problem-solving skills that will help them to face future challenges. Young people facing homelessness may also need support in other areas of their life; in their relationships, family life, education, employment and accommodation.

For young people, coming out of prison, the prospect of homelessness can be daunting and overwhelming. Prison can offer a type of security, particularly where a young person has not had this experience in their 'home' environment.

To understand your role in relation to working with someone who is homeless it is helpful to:

➢ Know that should a young person under the age of 18 present as homeless you are obligated to report this to Tusla as a child protection concern.

> ➤ Recognise that homelessness can be a complex issue and the young person is often experiencing a range of challenges; not just being without a home.

> ➤ Ultimately, the young person has a right to their autonomy and engagement with youth work is a choice.

Trauma and homelessness

It is increasingly recognized that many people who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness have been exposed to trauma. However, service systems are not always equipped with the necessary tools or the right responses to help people who have a history of trauma. Often this lack of understanding of how central the experience of trauma can be for young people experiencing homelessness results in service responses being inadequate[xx].

Help seeking behaviour

In the experience of youth workers, who work directly with young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, they lack information about the services, which exist, in many cases relying on established relationships with other services e.g. youth services, to support them to navigate. Homeless support services report that a high proportion of people who become homeless seek no advice about their situation before they meet homeless services[xxi]. Not being aware of available services

can influence a young person's help seeking behaviour. Young people have described having no-one and nowhere to turn for support when an emerging issue leading to homelessness arose. Many young people may fear being labelled or they may be apprehensive about the unknown. These pressures mean that young people may not look for help initially, causing their issues to spiral into a crisis. In other cases, depending on where they live, young people may have no access to emergency or hostel accommodation, i.e. outside urban centres such accommodation is less available.

Young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness need access to spaces that are informal, open during the evenings; services that are drop-in and young person friendly rather than appointment based. Services based on funding that requires a regular sign-in will be problematic for some young people whose habits are more erratic because of their circumstances. Services like free-phone helplines and signposting to relevant services that are available at night are important for young people.

Entry points into support and services

A young person with a homeless issue is more likely to approach someone with whom they have already have a trusting relationship, and this person may not have specialist training. This may be someone in a community or youth work organisation.

If you or a colleague is approached, you may be able to provide immediate support while starting the process of referring them on to the local authority

who have statutory responsibility in relation to the provision of homeless accommodation and related services for everyone 18 years and over.

You can also play a more preventative role. Being able to recognise early signs of family breakdown, financial difficulties and health issues among young people puts you in a position to offer early interventions. For young people who are recently out of home e.g. sofa-surfing, there may be a role to play in terms of youth mediation. Where a young person is over 18, a youth worker with an established relationship, can help the young person to acknowledge their homeless status and encourage them to register as homeless. In addition, where the young person is at risk of becoming homelessness, the youth worker can support them to recognise that they have a housing need and that they are eligible to register as homeless.

Referral/Advocacy Pathways

Navigating the homeless/welfare system in Ireland can be very confusing and daunting. Advocating and accompanying young people to appointments or gathering paperwork that will support their referral can make the process a lot easier. Understanding the specific nature of appropriate people and services is key to realising successful outcomes and spending time in building these relationships is critical. Oftentimes, the work that takes place in a youth work environment and the trust that exists within that context can support outcomes in other areas.

Accessing services

Before accessing a service, a youth worker can help the young person to prioritise their needs, particularly where there are complex and inter-related issues presenting. They should explain to the young person what to expect of a service (explain that not all services are specialist youth services), and in turn what might be expected from them (some services demand that the person is substance free). The following list outlines some of the barriers that exist for young people accessing services so that you can support them through it. The section then details good practices in service delivery.

Barriers in accessing services:

> Registering with homeless services can be a daunting prospect for a young person. Not understanding the different aspects of homelessness and how it can affect outcomes as well as the specific service engagement required can be a barrier to service access.

> Eligibility criteria for accessing different services can be impacted by previous engagement e.g. aftercare support. Where a young person has not spent 12 months or more in a residential facility, they may not be eligible for aftercare support upon turning 18.

> Young people may be put off from accessing a service if it means they are put on a waiting list or required to make an appointment several weeks in advance, particularly when their lives are chaotic.

> Young people may face barriers from service providers if their behaviour is seen as 'challenging' or if they have substance issues. A young person may be refused a service without due consideration being given to their circumstances or alternatives for support.

> LGBTI+ young people may be concerned that services will not be supportive of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Developing inclusive youth work practice to support young people affected by homelessness

Practical support

Where there is an established relationship with a youth service, youth workers have reported that some young people actively choose not to access hostel/emergency accommodation, where it is available due to prior negative experiences. For young people in these circumstances, youth workers report that help can include providing access to food, heat and other basics incluidng phone charging and clothes washing. In addition, support with transport costs and/or accompaniment when registering with homeless services and making referrals into other services are also key aspects of practical responses.

The following is some practical advice, which can be adopted within your organisation to make it a supportive environment and to help young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in your community.

Ask yourselves key questions of your young people:

- **Are there signs that a young person is at risk of homelessness.**
  - ➤ **Do they live in a volatile family situation?**
  - ➤ **Are they living independently on a limited income?**
  - ➤ **Have they a support network?**
  - ➤ **Are they in conflict with the law?**
  - ➤ **Does the young person have mental ill health?**
  - ➤ **Are there changes in personal circumstances? (e.g. parental separation, pending court appearance, bereavement, questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity, relationship break up etc.)**
  - ➤
- **Is the service accessible to young people experiencing homelessness?**
  - ➤ **Do they need to register?**
  - ➤ **Can they drop-in?**
  - ➤ **Is it in a central location?**

- **What level of commitment is required by the young person and is this realistic given their circumstances?**

Other jurisdictions are leading the way in establishing prevention and early intervention community-based collaborations to tackle youth homelessness such as the Geelong Project in Australia.

The Geelong Project[xxii]

The Geelong Project is an innovative place-based 'community of schools and youth services' model for early intervention involving population screening for risk, a flexible practice framework, youth-focused family-centred case management, and longitudinal follow-up and support as required until social and educational outcomes have been achieved. It intervenes early with young people at secondary school level who are clearly identified to be at risk of disengaging from school and family and entering the homelessness and related service systems. These are young people who display warning signs such as running away from home; couch surfing, and regularly missing school.

Starting in 2013, a trio of schools screened all students for their risk of entering the homeless system or leaving school before 12th grade. The schools then connected students at greater risk with the public and non-profit and youth focused agencies that could provide services, rental assistance, mentorship, counselling, to keep them and their families housed, and out of streets, tents and shelters.

Identified young people and their families were provided with a key support worker to discuss their challenges at home and at school and work together to provide new opportunities for the young person aimed at re-engaging them with school, family and the community. It is an early intervention project that works across a range of services.

The Geelong Project 'No Wrong Door Approach'[xxiii]

'To ensure that every young person that knocks on our door gets access to the help he or she needs.

Research indicates to us that young people:

- rarely come with just a single issue
- hate telling their stories over and over again
- get lost trying to find their way around the 'service system'
- don't come back if it's all too hard, and we lose the chance to help

Our staff work towards identifying all the needs of the young person, rather than the needs only specific to housing. This holistic approach, together with the pathways available to the team for referring young people to other services, ensures that no door is closed on the young person and they receive the overall support they need.'

Addressing and targeting youth homelessness

The Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness (2019) identify three actions to address and prevent homelessness among young adults experiencing homelessness:

1. Housing First for Youth: 'Housing First' is acknowledged internationally as the way to address homelessness effectively and we recommend the introduction of a programme of Housing First for Youth in Ireland. Housing First for Youth makes securing a home, the first step in tackling youth homelessness, addressing other issues once a home is secured.

2. Prevention and Early Intervention: Homelessness is not random. Its predictors are empirically established and understood. They are identifiable at an early stage by health services, schools and other community-based services. Intervening when needs and issues arise,

before they become critical or entrenched, is a more efficient use of public resources and secures better outcomes for young people and their families.

3. Address policies that disadvantage young people: An adequate supply of housing is key to addressing and preventing homelessness and current government policies in this regard are welcome and must be accelerated. However, even with a better housing supply, young people will continue to be disadvantaged in accessing and maintaining tenancies if their right to live independently is not clearly recognised and supported in government policies.

A more detailed plan of action is available here:

www.endyouthhomelessness.ie/

Working within a community of coalition and action

Where a young person is in crises and experiencing trauma, collaborative networks offer significant potential to change a situation in a long-term way. This includes good governance and decision-making models; a shared vision and goals; and strong leadership that facilitates cooperation across services. Working in collaboration with local family support services, health services, homeless support services, welfare services, education, employment and training services and schools is part of creating a "community of action, a coalition". In addition, specialist services e.g. Traveller Organisations[xxiv], Minority Ethnic Support Organisations/NGOs and LGBTI organisations can offer expertise and insights to support young people from specific identity groups.

Working with the family and other key relationships

Young people may have many assets which can help them build resilience and that support them through tough times. Included in these assets are young

people's pre-existing relationships with their friends and family. Helping a young person identify these and others with whom they have a positive or supportive relationship with, is a key task in supporting them through a difficult time.

The importance of family

While difficult family relationships and /or family conflict are long understood to be causal factors in youth homelessness, it is only recently that we have come to understand that 'family connectedness clearly holds strong currency and meaning for young people who experience homelessness' and 'fractured family relationships can be mended and restored over time'[xxv].

Developing knowledge and understanding of families and family relationships calls for a greater appreciation and understanding of the diverse and dynamic ways in which young people engage with and understand the notion of family. Family occupies a significant space in the everyday lives of young people who are experiencing homelessness. There can be a lot of diversity in how they make sense of, (re) construct, and come to terms with family relationships.

Research points to family mediation as a key path for service intervention, along with a greater investment in family support aimed at helping young people and their parents resolve past and/ or current disagreements and conflict.

Youth mediation

Youth mediation has a critical role to play in interventions aimed at mitigating situations and avoiding escalation. Being capable of creating a safe space for those involved to reconstruct their relationship, and guide people to transform their view of conflicts (and therefore also life) in a more positive and constructive way is critical. Importantly, youth mediation should be thought of in a wider family mediation context i.e. involving other services and/or family members within a referral network, where this is possible.

Youth mediation skills also ask that the youth workers acquire a proactive attitude towards their own permanent self-development, so that they can constructively engage in mitigating conflict and invest in the young person's individual capacity, to be responsible for creating and constructing their own lives.

Youth Worker offering a consistent relationship

The nature of homelessness means that having a key person who will consistently support needs and model a strong positive relationship with the young person, can provide a key a transformative relationship model[xxvi]. Every young person's needs will be different and that is the challenge in working with young people experiencing compound difficulties and blockages to realising their potential. Rarely is the development or progression of young people experiencing a range of barriers along a linear route. The task is to manage multiple journeys with patience, tolerance, persistence, resilience and a

willingness to overlook minor transgressions and start again, maintaining a commitment to the young person[xxvii].

Trauma informed responses to youth homelessness in practice

Homelessness impacting on learning and development

Interventions by a youth service:

"Homelessness is a traumatic experience for so many young people and in youth work, we try and mitigate the effects of trauma. The sensory needs of young people in emergency or overcrowded accommodation are compromised e.g. a lack of space for physical activity, a lack of space to process experiences. In addition, where some accommodation centres don't allow access during the day, it exacerbates the sense of exclusion. There can also be feelings of shame for young people living in such spaces[xxviii].

We started a homework club with the five-year olds to support their needs*. We work with the schools and ask the question, "what does it take for a child to be present and to be able to learn that day? When a child is in trauma, no one is learning. What are their needs? For children to be in a place where they can learn, their sensory needs must be met.

We put two emoji jars in the room where they enter the homework club and invite them to put in how they are feeling so we can measure what is going on for the young people. Emotionally things are really tough. Anger and sadness are two of the biggest emotions for the children coming in. One of

our programmes is targeting emotional needs, we developed a special programme and we do mindfulness. Sensory needs are at the core of everything too; that includes movement of your body and occupational therapy on your body but how do you do that in emergency accommodation? We work with the local school on a universal programme introducing occupational speech and therapy with the school children. For homeless young people, occupational therapy is a key intervention.

For both the older children and young people, we do an assessment with them, side by side. That includes everything; around their confidence, experiences of education, experiences of loss, everything is taken into account. If homelessness is a need, we look at what the specific needs are and sometimes it can be about helping the young person to build a relationship with their family. There could be family breakdown and if we need to look at a whole family approach, we will start a cluster with other relevant agencies. We work within a strong network of agencies but importantly we will represent the young person and we will go to the other agencies to represent the other family members, if that is what they want.

Where a young person is homeless but has not come to terms with that fact yet, your role as a youth worker is to be there for them. It's about working with the young person through a process until they are ready to take the necessary steps. What it takes for a young person to go through the process is huge. There is trauma involved. It can take time but that is the commitment with youth work."

Danielle McKenna, Rialto Youth Project.

*The Rialto Youth Project secured mainstream funding to target work with under 10s as part of an early intervention strategy in their area.

Homelessness causing a crisis of attachment

Interventions by a homeless agency youth service:

"In youth work, there is the sign-posting work and understanding the layers of youth homeless, being able to differentiate between, fights (as rite of passage) and more entrenched situations. What we have missed though is taking a more psychological understanding of what homelessness is. It is a response to trauma and attachment. If you are reasonably attached, you have a level of resilience to respond to what life is going to throw at you; it also means, your parents are reasonably attached in response, so a child becoming homeless is a symptom of something else going on.

Youth work can support young people by teaching resilience and being more mindful of attachment theory[xxix]. Having one strong positive relationship is very important but how do you go about building that relationship? The question is how do you put that into practice?

We need to find the language of the young person and talk to them in their language. A young person might have a different meaning for words than us as professionals looking to respond to them. We need to reflect on what is homeless and what 'home' means because, it means different things to different people. For many of the young people we work with, they do not have early experiences of security, stability and love that might be associated with 'home'. When we say "we need to get you out of homelessness and this is what we want to get you into" that may be a foreign territory to a young person; the person may not just be experiencing rooflessness but also rootlessness.

Homelessness is a response to trauma and within the sector, we need to become more 'trauma informed[xxx].' For young people who have lived with homelessness for much of their lives, trauma may exist where they have never experienced a secure and safe home environment. Importantly, trauma is the consequence of not being nurtured in childhood; it then follows through in your inability to deal with something outside of yourself. Parenting is key here, but many parents do not have the skills and that is why family and youth mediation is so critical to outcomes that last."

Paul Kelly, Project Leader, Focus Ireland.

Look at your whole organisation approach:

- Look at what has led to the young person becoming homeless. By looking at the whole person, it will allow the youth worker to identify key issues that the young person may need help to overcome.

- By being consistent and being there a youth service/youth worker can prevent a young person from losing all sense of belonging.

- Train all staff, including office support and caretaking staff, in how to listen to young people and their complex needs. Consider the specific training supports that will resource your youth work staff to respond to needs presenting. (see Staff Training below).

- Supporting a young person to plan is key, particularly if there are signs of being at risk of homelessness and where a young person is not familiar with planning everyday practical tasks.

- Social media and Internet connectivity are essential tools for young people who are homeless in staying connected and mitigating what can be a profound experience of isolation. For that reason, ensuring up

to date and relevant social media platforms and information, is a key service response.

- Resource staff to support people to advocate for themselves; empowering young people to come to terms with specific aspects of the system that are affecting their lives and engaging in strategies to address key issues.

- Supporting emotional needs can be key to a youth service. Developing responses in co-operation with other services e.g. a sensory support programme/occupational therapy for young people in emergency accommodation.

- Consult young people already using your service about how you could make it a more relaxed and welcoming environment for others.

- Are there opportunities for them to engage in a variety of youth friendly activities?

- Homeless young people have the same hopes, dreams and ambitions as other young people. Youth services can provide them with a safe space to be a young person and not be defined by their challenges.

- Recognise that young people experiencing homelessness will likely make progress and regress. It is important that the young person feel that they can engage with the worker/service even if they have not followed through on an agreed plan or if they or their situation relapses.

Staff training

There are specific skills that staff can develop through training. Skills in listening, identifying and understanding issues, solution focused approaches are all important examples. Specific training to support young people experiencing homelessness include:

- Youth mediation and conflict resolution training (helps transform the way people look at conflicts, changing from something negative and avoidable to an opportunity for change and something that can be handled in a constructive way).

- Restorative practice[xxxi] as a key area that supports workers with capacity to be able to rebuild relationships where relationships have broken down.

- Crisis Intervention training can support youth work staff with meeting emotional needs and in responding to trauma.

- Training in reflective practice to support a whole organisation approach in working with young people in homelessness[xxxii].

- Emotional and sensory support training including in the context of an occupational therapy programme, in coordination with other services e.g. local schools.

- Training to increase life skills in young people at risk of homelessness e.g. the Pathways Programme for young people leaving care[xxxiii]; and the STEPS Personal Development Programme[xxxiv] which supports positive goal setting with young people.

- Train staff in understanding the complexities of the housing system.

- Intercultural competency training to support the specific cultural issues impacting on young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, including young Travellers.

- LGBTI+ training, specifically in relation to homelessness or risk of homelessness.

Working with young people with complex needs can be challenging for staff members. It is vital that staff members are secure in their role and are aware of the limitations of the youth service when supporting young people. Regular support and supervision are key for staff members to be able to continue their work to a high-quality standard on an ongoing basis.

Ensure you maintain a relationship

Sometimes young people who are homeless can find it difficult to consistently engage with a service. Building a practice where you allow some flexibility to re-engage and following up with young people after a period of absence can help keep a thread of support available for the young person involved.

Supporting young people leaving institutional care

Resourcing resilience internally is at the core of work with young people in this context. Having the skills to build resilience while developing problem solving and coping skills can minimise the effects of negative, stressful situations. These skills can allow a young person to face challenges and learn from them; as well as developing ways to make more healthy life choices and opportunities to understand how feelings affect behaviours.
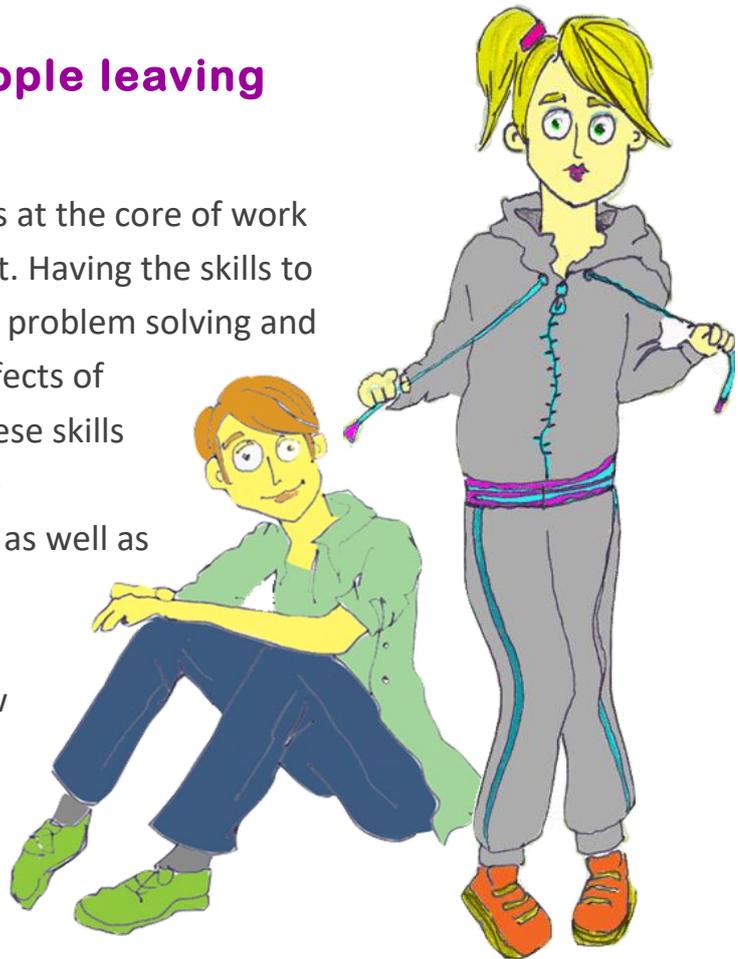
Running a programme to support young people leaving institutional care

- The focus of the programme should be on modifying known risk and building resilience. The Pathways programme developed as a collaboration between EPIC, Focus Ireland and Empower is a key training resource here.

- Programmes based on skill development and competencies can have a positive impact on young people, supporting with risk management and resilience building skills including:
  - ➢ Problem solving skills
  - ➢ Assertiveness Skills
  - ➢ Self Esteem
  - ➢ Goal Setting
  - ➢ Decision Making
  - ➢ Anger management
  - ➢ Coping Skill
  - ➢ Relationship enhancement
  - ➢ Social Support Identification
  - ➢ Emotional Intelligence

- In addition, there are a range of programmes designed to address specific topics, which can affect young people such as Substance misuse, Nutrition, Physical activity, Bullying, Sexual health.

Checklist 14 - How accessible is your organisation to young people who are homeless?

This checklist can help you to identify how you can improve your service for young people who are homeless.

Public image

How we present our service to our community

- Our service is visibly welcoming for young people at risk of experiencing homelessness?　　YES　PARTLY　NO

- Local services are aware of the support we provide, and the referral process we use.　　YES　PARTLY　NO

- Your social media platforms are relevant and helpful to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.　　YES　PARTLY　NO

- Information on support services for homeless people is displayed in the service.　　YES　PARTLY　NO

Programme planning and delivery

Our programmes are designed and delivered to include the diverse needs and identities of young people that face homelessness

- Our service is flexible to accommodate the needs of young people who are homeless including offering late opening times on at least on a part-time basis. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- We consider the suitability of materials prior to using them with particular groups (e.g. we consider personal circumstances etc.) **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Connecting young people to services:

➢ Our service has a working understanding of the referral process into statutory services. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

➢ Our service has identified good working relationships with services and supports relevant for homeless young people and has developed relationships with them. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

➢ Our service has good working relationships with specialist support organisations e.g. migrant, Traveller and LGBTI+ support organisations. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Professional development

Our staff and volunteers are trained and supported to deliver an inclusive youth service

- Staff and volunteers understand issues relating to homelessness. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- Our service understands the signs that a young person is at risk of homelessness, including living in a volatile family situation, lack of a support network, conflict with the law, and changes in personal circumstances. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- Staff and volunteers have an appropriate range of skills and access to training opportunities to help young people respond to the various needs presenting. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- Staff and volunteers speak openly about mental health topics. **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- Staff and volunteers promote positive messages about help seeking behaviour **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

- Staff and volunteers receive support and supervision (e.g. team meetings, self-care interventions, one-to-one formal supervision, etc.) **YES** **PARTLY** **NO**

Policies and procedures

We have a written commitment to deliver an equal and inclusive service

- Our service has a critical incident plan

  YES   **PARTLY**   **NO**

- Our service has clear policies and procedures in relation to young people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness e.g. on health promotion, drugs and alcohol use, bullying prevention, equality and inclusion, child protection, etc

Participation

We make sure we include the voices of young people at all levels of our youth service

- Our service consults with young people about how homeless issues can affect their engagement with youth services and on how youth services can support them, including how to make our space and service as welcoming as possible.

  YES   **PARTLY**   **NO**

- Young people feel that they can re-engage with the youth worker/service, even if they have not followed through on an agreed plan.

  YES   **PARTLY**   **NO**

Useful contacts

Specialist Homeless Support Organisations

Focus Ireland:

Phone:
- **Dublin** 01 881 5900
- **Waterford:** 051 879 810
- **Limerick:** 061 405 300
- **Sligo:** 071 914 9974
- **Cork:** 021 04273646
- **Kilkenny:** 056 7794565

Website:www.focusireland.ie
Email: help@focusireland.ie

Focus Ireland provides information, support and advocacy opportunities to people experiencing homelessness in Dublin. Their website provides focused information on all aspects of homelessness. The Focus Ireland Prevention Hub includes information for frontline workers and a list of useful organisations.

Crosscare

Phone: 01 836 0011
Email: info@crosscare.ie
Website: www.crosscare.ie/contact-crosscare
Map of Services:
www.crosscare.ie/images/phocagallery/75years/general_crosscare2016/MAP-FINAL.pdf

Crosscare play a role in the provision of services to people affected by homelessness in the greater Dublin area. Great efforts are being made across the sector to improve the quality of service and environment on offer.

No 4 Youth Service

Phone: 091 568 483
Website: www.no4.ie/
Email: youthservice@no4.ie

No 4 Youth Service provide a wide range of supports for young people aged 13 – 25 years, all of which are based on a youth work approach, ensuring that young people aid their own personal development. Support is provided for young people who are:

- homeless or at risk or homelessness;
- not in education, employment or training;
- from minority ethnic groups;
- without the supports of their families;
- in the justice system;
- live in or are leaving direct provision hostels.

EPIC

Phone:
- **Dublin** 01 8727661
- **Cork: 021 242 8434**
- **Galway:** 091 395 605
- **Limerick:** 061 514518

Website: www.epiconline.ie/

EPIC is the only independent national organisation providing direct 1:1 advocacy support to children and young people in care; to enable them to have their views and concerns heard, to empower them to speak for themselves, to resolve the issues and problems they raise, to help them get the services and resources they need and bring about positive change in their lives.

Simon Community Ireland

Phone HQ: 01 671 1606
Website: www.simon.ie/home.aspx
Email: info@simoncommunity.com

(to contact local Community Offices go to www.simon.ie)

The Simon Communities are a network of independent Communities based in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East, responding to local needs and supported by a National Office in the areas of policy, research, communications and best practice. They support over 11,000 men, women and children each year.

Mental health Support

Aware

Phone: 1890 303302
Website: www.aware.ie

Aware Supports those who are directly affected by depression and operates a helpline from 10am to 10pm Monday to Wednesday and 10am to 1am Thursday to Sunday. The Aware helpline is a non-directive listening service for people affected by depression, either as sufferers or as family and friends. The helpline offers a non-judgmental listening ear to people who may be distressed or worried, or just need someone to talk to. You can also call the helpline if you are worried about someone who may be depressed or for information about depression or Aware services.

Childline	Childline is 24-hour service for children and young people up to 18 years of age. Childline is open 365 days a year (even Christmas Day!). It offers support to young people through the Childline listening service over the phone. You can call Childline for a chat or to talk about any problems you might have. Calls to Childline are confidential and they don't have caller ID or trace any calls. It won't cost you anything to call Childline and their number won't show up on the phone bill.
Phone: 1800 66 66 66 **Website:** www.childline.ie	

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[i] *Living in Limbo: Homeless Young People's Paths to Housing.* Dublin: Focus Ireland.(Mayock and Parker 2017).

[ii] FEANSTA: www.feantsa.org/en

[iii] Central Statistics Office:
http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/Define.asp?maintable=E5003&PLanguage=0

[iv] Focus Ireland: www.focusireland.ie/resource-hub/about-homelessness/

[v] March 2019 Homeless Report:
www.housing.gov.ie/sites/default/files/publications/files/homeless_report_-_march_2019.pdf

[vi] As above.

[vii] *Living in Limbo: Homeless Young People's Paths to Housing.* Dublin: Focus Ireland. (Mayock and Parker 2017).

[viii] 'The Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness was established in September 2017 as a way of consolidating the work of different organisations (including NYCI) who are trying to tackle youth homelessness. We hope that through the Coalition, we will be better able to draw attention to the issue and highlight our collective solutions.'

[ix] See p.15 for the ETHOS definition.

[x] Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness 2019

[xi] This information is adapted from SpunOut.ie: https://spunout.ie/life/article/apply-for-emergency-accommodation

[xii] *Food acccess and nutritional health among families experiencing homelessness in the Dublin region.* Dublin: Focus Ireland (Share and Hennessy 2017).

[xiii] Homeless children and education: An evaluation of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act. *Children and Youth Services Review, 23*(12), 941-969.(Biggar 2001).

[xiv] *Home Works: A Study on the Education Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accomodation.* Dublin: CRA.(Children's Rights Alliance 2018); *Thirty Five Pupils Homeless Every Two Days in February.* INTO Congress 2018, INEC, Killarney.(Irish National Teachers Organisation 2018).

[xv] *Home Works: A Study on the Education Needs of Children Experiencing Homelessness and Living in Emergency Accomodation.* Dublin: CRA (Children's Rights Alliance 2018).

[xvi] At the time of writing, Focus and BeLong To have commissioned a specific piece of research looking at the circumstances around the over representation of LGBTI in youth homelessness.

[xvii] *"I don't tell people I live here, it's a homeless hub… it's embarrassing. It's horrible, it's not nice".* (Thomas, aged 16). From 'No Place Like Home' a report outlining children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs. Dr Niall Muldoon, The Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019:
www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2019/04/No-Place-Like-Home.pdf.

[xviii] 'I grew up in State care, to say that University has changed my life would be an understatement':
www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/17/i-grew-up-in-state-care-to-say-that-university-has-changed-my-life-would-be-an-understatement?CMP=share_btn_link

xix *Submission to TUSLA on Review of National Leaving and Aftercare Policy 2011.* EPIC.(EPIC, 2011).

xx *Recognising the Link Between Trauma and Homelessness.* Belgium. FEANSTA (2017).

xxi Focus Ireland https://www.focusireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/information-guidebook.pdf

xxii The Geelong Project: www.thegeelongproject.com.au/early-intervention/early-intervention-model/

xxiii The Geelong Project: www.thegeelongproject.com.au/early-intervention/no-wrong-door-approach/

xxiv Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service is available for presentations and training on Traveller culture. Discover the history of Travelling People in Ireland and what it means to be a Traveller in today's society. Explore the legal reforms that have impacted this nomadic community and learn about the effect these changes have had on the determinants of good mental and physical health. Presentations will help you gain an understanding of the most pressing concerns facing Travellers and develop cultural competency and strategies for effective interventions. Contact Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service as 01 524 0173 for more information.

xxv "They're Always Complicated but That's the Meaning of Family in My Eyes": Homeless Youth Making Sense of "Family" and Family Relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 1-31 (Mayock and Parker 2018, 26)

xxvi The structural issues leading to youth homeless are identified at 'Addressing and Targeting Youth Homelessness' on page 20.

xxvii Adapted from 'Youth Works: How to Use this Framework' . Nora Greer and Joe Hawkins. YCNI (2013).

xxviii *"I don't tell people I live here, it's a homeless hub… it's embarrassing. It's horrible, it's not nice".* (Thomas, aged 16). From 'No Place Like Home' a report outlining children's views and experiences of living in Family Hubs. Dr Niall Muldoon, The Ombudsman for Children's Office, 2019: www.oco.ie/app/uploads/2019/04/No-Place-Like-Home.pdf

xxix Bowlby's Attachment Theory explained by The School of Life: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3LM0nE81mIE

xxx 'Many youth are exposed to traumatic events, including those in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, as well as those who experience homelessness; an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.' *Implementing a Trauma-Informed Approach for Youth across Service Sectors* https://youth.gov/docs/Trauma_Informed_Approach_508.pdf

xxxi Restorative Practice: www.restorativepracticesireland.ie/

xxxii Reflective Practice in youth work: http://youthworkireland.ie/images/uploads/general/Siobhan_mcgrory.pdf

xxxiii **PATHWAYS is an** aftercare guide that has been created for young people who are preparing to leave care by young people who have left care. It is a joined initiative between EPIC, Focus Ireland and Empower Ireland: www.epiconline.ie/pathways-guide-to-leaving-care/

xxxiv STEPS Personal Development Programme: www.talktotom.ie/the-steps-programme.html