**Big Sofa Surf Factoids**

**Sofa Surfing**

1. Young people often sofa surf for a long time before they ask for help when they run out of mates. One of our young people didn’t sleep in a bed for two years!
2. There is no emergency accommodation for under 25s in Coventry. If a young person is kicked out of home, they will need to ‘sofa surf’ – staying on mates or relations sofas or floors– until they can get into a hostel. The only alternative is to sleep rough – very unsafe and risky.
3. Young people rarely sleep rough. They ‘sofa surf’ around friends. Over 90% of new young people we meet are sofa surfing.

**Coventry**

1. 17% of the population of Coventry are aged 16-24 (2018, 60,300 people).
2. There are over 150 places in hostels in Coventry specifically for under 25s but they are increasingly always full. Residents can stay for up to two years and get help with the skills they need to move on to a place of their own.
3. The only realistic option for young people in Coventry who become homeless (including those who work) is to get a place in a hostel. Private rented that is accessible to them is almost non-existent and there is a waiting list for social housing.
4. Coventry Council estimate that there will be a need for an extra 42,200 homes up to 2031 to meet the needs of a growing population.
5. In 2017/18 there were 13,632 people in Coventry looking for homes on Homefinder the social housing gateway with an average 166 people bidding to get each property. Single homeless young people over 18 who are not owed a housing duty have virtually no chance of being offered accommodation.
6. Coventry City Council's bill for putting people in temporary accommodation rose from £570,000 in 2013-14 to £4.1m in the year 2017-18. The council is under increasing financial pressure with an expected gap in funding of an estimated £120m between 2010 and 2020 but significant increases in demand for services.
7. There are more than 500 ‘households’ living in temporary accommodation– hotels and B&Bs – in Coventry at a cost of between £40 to £100 per night. There are 1,000 children with families often housed in a single hotel room. Some of the families have been there for over 2 years. The Council must house them by law but they have no houses available to move them on.
8. There is a severe shortage of social housing in Coventry. The Council cannot build permanent Social Housing by law, only temporary.
9. One bedroom flats in Coventry to rent privately start at around £120 per week and look at any advert in an estate agents window and you will see that you will need around £1000 in your back pocket to put down. Social housing flats are around £75 - £80 per week.
10. Despite the increase in purpose built student residences, landlords still like to let to students – much more profitable. Have a Google and try and find private rented one bed places in Coventry that don’t say ‘student’ in the advert!
11. In 2017/18 Centrepoint data shows that 355 young people approached Coventry Council for help with homelessness. Not all young people are counted so this is an underestimate. Only 220 (61%) received an assessment and only 134 (38%) were accepted as in priority need and owed a housing duty by the council.
12. The biggest cause of youth homelessness is relationship breakdown in the parental home – 46% of those who become homeless in Coventry.
13. 25% of properties in Coventry are private rented, 17% social housing and 57% owner-occupied. Nationally it’s 20% private rented, 63% owner-occupiers.
14. You used to be able to go into the council and speak to someone about your housing benefit or council tax. This is not possible now due to cutbacks. Phoning the council means a long wait of usually half an hour to get through on a local call number draining the credit from a struggling person’s phone. It takes the council at least 4 weeks to answer an e mail!

**Housing**

1. Landlords usually have mortgages on their properties. Two-thirds of the largest buy-to-let lenders decline mortgages to landlords if their tenants are on housing benefit. Nationwide, Co-op & Natwest are dropping these restrictions.
2. Of the 4.5million in rental accommodation, around 889,000 in England receive housing benefit to help pay their rent. 1 in 10 agents in England refuse to let to benefit claimants.
3. Currently, a landlord can ask a tenant to leave their property at any time after the initial fixed term has ended – without needing to give a reason why. This insecurity and uncertainty can leave private tenants unable to settle down in an area, and unwilling to report repairs or maintenance for fear of being asked to leave. The government have said they will end this but have yet to action it.

**Statutory Homeless**

1. First stop when homeless or at risk of homelessness should be Coventry Council Customer Service Centre behind Starbucks in Broadgate to see if you are owed a housing duty by the council – most homeless people over 18 aren’t!
2. ‘Statutorily homeless’ describes anyone who is homeless and owed a housing duty by their local authority. To qualify, an individual must be eligible, unintentionally homeless (for example not homeless due to rent arrears that they could have paid) and in ‘priority need’ (which includes but is not limited to, under 18s, pregnant women and those with severe mental or physical needs). Complicated!
3. Most young people over 18 who become homeless are not found to be in ‘priority need’ so the council does not have a duty to house them – an appointment with a housing adviser/a leaflet with contact details on is the most help they will get.
4. If the council has a statutory duty to house you and you turn down what they offer their duty is discharged – you are on your own so don’t do it!

**Bardsley**

1. Bardsley Youth Project saw 110 different young people who needed help with homelessness in 2017/18, 47 of whom were new to us. Despite still being a part time project with only two staff, this is over 20% of those who have presented to the council and not been given any help. (from *Centrepoint* Youth Homelessness Databank figures)

1. Homelessness ‘happens’ to young people. It does not define them nor limit what their potential should be. At Bardsley Youth Project we have helped graduates who are homeless, full time workers, apprentices and students who have gone on to university.
2. Social housing flats have nothing in them but the four walls when you move in – no carpets, no furniture, no cooker nor fridge. We help young people moving out of hostels and into flats with some of these basics by collecting second-hand furniture and household goods – even crockery and cutlery!

**Myth Busters**

1. Myth Buster: Getting pregnant will automatically get you a flat won’t it? NO – you have a right to Emergency Housing in a hotel or B&B then you join the queue to wait for more permanent accommodation.
2. Myth Buster: Living in a hostel is awful isn’t it? NO - you get your own front door, bathroom, bedroom, kitchen and lounge with help from staff to support you. Keep the rules, pay your bills and you are fine! Hostel dwellers are moved up the priority list for a council flat (after 6 weeks or so) so you may not be there for long if you aren’t bothered where you live and don’t mind a bedsit (aka studio flat).
3. Myth Buster: The council has to find me somewhere to live if I am homeless don’t they? NO – unless you are ‘statutorily homeless’ that is in a group that the council must house by law and it’s not your fault you are homeless. It’s complicated but most fit, healthy, single over 18s don’t qualify!
4. Myth Buster: I can move to another town and get help can’t I? NO – the local council only has a duty to accommodate those who they are legally obliged to do so AND with a local connection to Coventry or who have lived here for at least six months.

**Jobs**

1. Rents in hostels are between £200 to £250 PER WEEK. For people on benefits most of this is covered but for working young people living there it can be unaffordable. Hostels are realistically the only first option for young people in Coventry even those who are working.

1. Youth unemployment in the UK is still almost three times higher than the rest of the population. Getting into work is particularly tough for disadvantaged young people facing extra challenges in their lives.
2. Young people under 25 are over £3 per hour out of pocket on minimum wage doing the same job as an older person but their living costs aren’t less! Under 25s don’t get tax credits either.
3. Working young people are usually on zero hours’ contracts. This means they often don’t know what they will earn from one week to the next, they get no sick pay, no redundancy pay and can be laid off without any reason. How can they build a secure future?
4. Young people without the ‘bank of Mum and Dad’ supporting them have little back up when things go wrong so can stay poor and struggling for many years.
5. Young people aged 16 – 24 face the highest levels of unemployment in Britain. During the period July to September 2017, youth unemployment was 11%, compared to 4% for the rest of the working age population. 62% of the 790,000 young people in Britain who are currently not in employment, education or training are economically inactive – not actively looking for a job – they have given up hope.

1. People working on zero hour contracts have the lowest overall incomes and highest levels of personal debt when compared to those not working at all!

**Benefits**

1. Young people under 25 get £15.20 less benefit per week to live on than older people but still have to pay the same to live!
2. People under 35 on benefits in Coventry in private rented homes get a maximum of £67.62 per week towards their rent – the single room rate in a shared house. Most rooms cost more than this and, apart from the cast of Friends, who wants to be living with mates at that age?
3. Universal Credit is all online so access is needed. Homeless young people often have trouble keeping credit on their phones for access and have limited access to PCs.
4. There is a delay of 4-5 weeks before you receive the first payment from Universal Credit. The figures say that 80 per cent of claimants receive their payments within five weeks – that means 20 per cent don’t, which is one in five people not being paid on time and left with no income at all for long periods.
5. Young people on benefits are 4 times more likely to be sanctioned than older people but people in work don’t usually lose 4 weeks of wages for being late once!
6. 1 in 25 young people (age 18-25) in England are living independently from their parents. A single, childless young person on benefits gets less than £500 per month to pay rent and living expenses. Government policy on benefits and minimum wage assumes that ‘bank of Mum and Dad’ is supporting young people well into their mid-twenties – full grown adults reliant on other adults to survive!
7. Nearly eight in ten (79 per cent) of private landlords cited sanctions as a reason for being concerned about letting to young people on Universal Credit.

**Health**

1. No home, no bed, no security and no stability. It’s exhausting and affects every part of a vulnerable young person’s life. No wonder they take risks to find somewhere to sleep.

1. The physical toll of sleeping outside is one issue, but sleeping on a bus or ever-changing network of sofas and floors can be just as challenging. Young people's mental health issues like depression, anxiety or anorexia are easily made worse.

1. Homeless young people often don’t have access to enough affordable, nutritious food. 60% of young people reported that they had skipped meals, slept hungry and eaten less because they couldn’t afford to eat.
2. 20% of young people leaving care will be homeless within two years.

**Education**

1. A disrupted education is a common issue for homeless young people that drastically affects their chances of achieving qualifications. And without education or training, it’s even harder to find sustainable employment.
2. Try concentrating on college or school when you don’t know where you are going to sleep tonight.

1. Keeping up appearances is hard when you don’t have a permanent place to live. One young man was sent away from school repeatedly for wearing trainers but that was all he had and he was too proud to say so!

**Nationally**

1. There are 236,000 people experiencing homelessness in Britain at any one time and Crisis expect this to double by 2041.
2. Watch the terminology! ‘Affordable housing’ rent is up to 85% of the going rate in an area – not ‘affordable’ to most of those on a low income in areas where housing costs are high. ‘Social’ housing rent is up to 50%.
3. Government data reveals that almost half of all people in England aged 25 to 34 are paying a private landlord for their accommodation.
4. Homeless Charity Crisis say that 97% of private rented homes in England are unaffordable for single people, couples and small families on benefits.
5. Half of all homeless people first become homeless aged under 21, with the majority going through the experience again and again.
6. According to Centrepoint, 86,000 young people in the UK approached their council for help with homelessness in 2016/17. **58% of those asking for help don't receive a statutory housing duty.** The majority of young people are given informal support that may be as little as a generic hand out.
7. Affordability is a major challenge for young people looking to rent privately. Rents in the private sector have increased steadily since 2010 at a rate three times greater than average wages and average rents are now more than a third of full-time local pay in over half of all English districts.