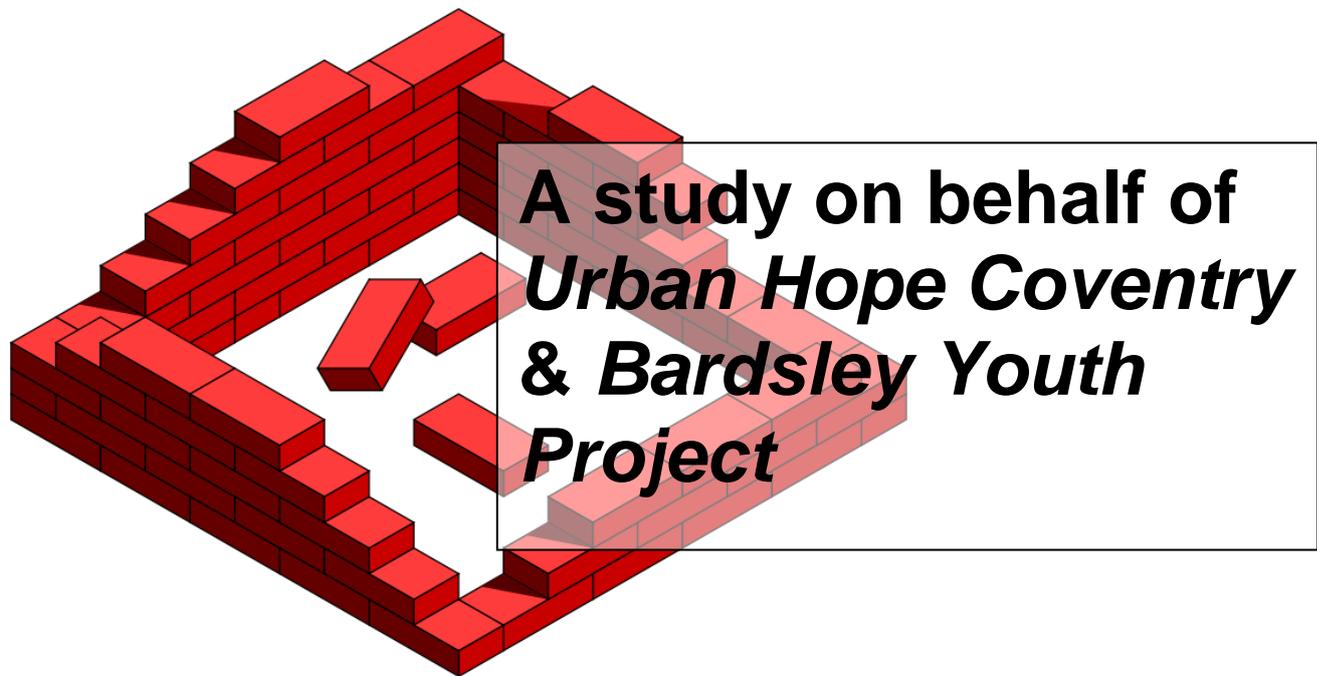


Youth Homelessness in Coventry – what can we do?



September
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Why this report?

In the Summer & Autumn of 2014, *Bardsley Youth Project & Urban Hope* noticed particularly high levels of youth homelessness in those that came. In the Autumn term, 9% of the regular attendees at *Bardsley* were homeless.

Our initial idea was to buy a house to provide supported accommodation with live-in house parents, but would this be feasible and the best way to help? This study will look at the issues, current provision and gaps in provision so we can identify ways we can realistically help. I will propose several options and then further work will be done on a business plan once an option has been chosen.

Homelessness is a complex issue, with young people sometimes even more so. We do not want to breed a generation of young people who are always dependent on others for help – we need to keep in mind the goal of adult responsibility and personal growth. Compassion and good intentions of generous people can be destructive rather than helpful – for example, most homeless charities discourage giving money to beggars as this perpetuates their destructive lifestyles but as followers of Christ, our heart tells us to give and respond to the perceived immediate need. Working with young people for nine years has taught me that we sometimes see at Bardsley exactly what the young people want us to see.

I came across an excellent article exploring this issue.¹ The author points us to the founder of *Centre Point*, Rev. Ken Leech, and his ‘theology on the run’ – theology done in the heat of practice.

*‘This is theology which overtly integrates beliefs about God with how we live and treat others. It is powerful because truth is found when we bring together orthodoxy (right belief) with orthopraxis (right action). We cannot get away from the basic challenge that Jesus calls us to **follow him**. Faith is much more than mental assent – the Christian faith demands to be put into practice.’*

Kuhrts states that in his experience of working with homeless people, long term effective transformative work must contain a blend of **grace** along with a holding to **truth**. I hope that this report will allow us to grapple with this tension and help make real changes to the lives of young people.

It is a privilege to help young people when they are most in need and to see them flourish, and I hope that as a church, we can be a bigger part of the transformation that we all long to see. If you want to find out more, please get in touch.

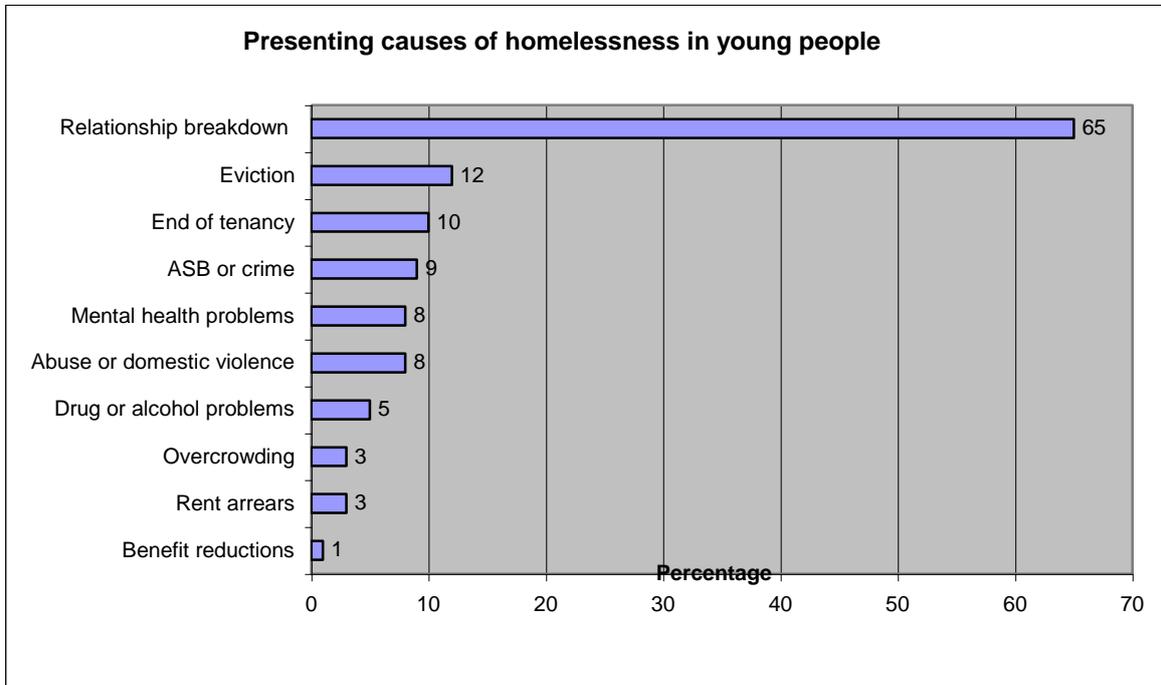
Pat Clarke, report author, e mail: pat@bardsleyyouth.org

¹ ‘When helping the homeless doesn’t help’ John Kuhrts, Third Way magazine, May 2011



‘Homeless’

When we hear the word ‘homeless’ for almost all of us it conjures up an image of the rough sleeper in a shop doorway, the beggar in the subway, and the drunk in the precinct. Youth homelessness does not look like this.



Source: ‘No Excuses, Preventing homelessness for the next generation’, report from Homeless Link, 2013

Young people (age 24 and under) are rarely permanent rough sleepers – and this is the case in Coventry.² They are ‘sofa surfing’, staying with a succession of friends and relatives. They tend to exhaust all other options of help before getting into the homeless system; at *Bardsley* we know one young man who had been ‘sofa surfing’ for two years before he asked for help.

Most homeless young people also have complex needs. Substance abuse, behavioural issues, poor mental health and growing into adulthood all pose problems not just for the young people themselves, but those providing accommodation that is sustainable and suitable.

² According to the Salvation Army on their Rough Sleeper Walks around the city.



Defining Homelessness

Crisis says:

'Whilst there is some debate over the precise definition of homelessness there is a widespread acceptance that homelessness is about more than rooflessness. A home is not just a physical space; it provides "roots, identity, security, a sense of belonging and a place of emotional wellbeing". It is also a practical pre-requisite to living and working in modern society, with a permanent address often being a basic requirement for employers and other essential services'.³

Homelessness is defined by *Crisis* as

- Not having a roof over your head
- Being evicted or at risk of being evicted
- Living in temporary accommodation
- Not being able to afford to stay at current accommodation
- Being at risk of violence at home
- Staying with friends ('sofa surfing') and being asked to leave
- Not having family you can live with

Statutory Homelessness Criteria

There is a process that decides if you are actually 'statutory homeless'. The council relies on guidelines based on the Housing Act 1996 and has to assess every person approaching them for help following these guidelines.⁴ You must fulfil **all criteria** to be housed by the local authority.

1. Is the person a British citizen (or habitually resident)?
2. Is the person in 'priority need'?
3. If not are they 'vulnerable'?
4. Are they unintentionally homeless?
5. Do they have a connection to the local area (lived in the area for at least 6 months, work in the area or have close family there)?

For young people aged 18 or over, only those classed as 'statutory homeless' and in 'priority need' must be helped by law to find accommodation, whether temporary or permanent. Criteria 2, 3 and 4 are open to interpretation and these areas are where many young people are found not to be homeless.

'Priority Need'

Criteria 2 – You are in 'Priority Need' if

- You have dependent children
- You are at least 7 months pregnant
- You are aged 16-17
- You are a care leaver aged 18-21
- You are classed as '**vulnerable**', a decision made by the local authority

³ 'What is homelessness?' paper from Crisis, 2005

⁴ DCLG (2006) *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*



'Vulnerable'

Criteria 3 – You are more likely to be classed as 'vulnerable' if

- You have a physical or learning disability or mental health problems
- You had to leave your home because of actual or threatened violence or harassment
- You have been in care
- You have been in a young offenders' institute or prison in the past

'Vulnerability' is not defined in the Housing Act 1996, leaving it open to interpretation for young people who do not fit any of these criteria.

'Vulnerability' is decided using the *Pereira Test*, a High Court case in 1998.

Young people are considered 'vulnerable' and therefore in 'priority need' if they *'would be less likely to fend for themselves than an **ordinary homeless person** so that they would suffer injury or detriment in circumstances where a less vulnerable person would be able to cope without harmful effects'*⁵

The comparison to an 'ordinary homeless person' means that you would have to be very needy indeed to meet the criteria. The average homeless person has a life expectancy of 47, they are over nine times more likely to commit suicide and 13 times more likely to be a victim of violence.⁶

This definition of 'vulnerable' was challenged in May 2015 in a Supreme Court judgement and the comparison must now be made to '**an ordinary person who is rendered homeless**'. However, it will take some time for local authority guidelines to change in practice, and this broad definition is still open to varying interpretation.

There is a concern by both *Crisis* and *Shelter* that the judgement whether a person is 'vulnerable' or not is often driven by availability of resources, not the assessment of the individual.

'Intentionally' homeless

Criteria 4 – You are 'unintentionally' homeless

Intentionally homeless means that you could have avoided becoming homeless. The local authority does not have to help you if you left suitable accommodation that you could have stayed in or if you had to leave your home because of something you did or failed to do.

For a young person, this could be being evicted from home because of bad behaviour. However if the acts that led to homelessness were not deliberate, the person is not intentionally homeless; for example if the young person has mental health difficulties that led to eviction.

⁵ Quoted in 'Turned away – the treatment of single homeless people by local authority homelessness services in England' a report by Crisis, October 2014

⁶ Jon Sparkes, chief exec of Crisis quoted in 'UK homeless now no longer have to take impossible accommodation test', Owen Boycott, The Guardian, 13th May 2015



If a young person over 18 is found to be 'intentionally homeless', the only requirement, even if the person is in 'priority need', is up to 28 days emergency accommodation and advice to help the person find their own accommodation. Young people under 18 (still children under the law) who have not chosen to be helped as a 'looked after child' by social services can be found to be 'intentionally homeless' and therefore will not be 'priority need' so not entitled to help.

The Situation in Coventry

There have been major changes in the last few years leading to major upheaval of services to homeless young people and gaps in provision.

Coventry City Council put out to tender seven contracts for provision of 'accommodation and support services for vulnerable young people age 16-24' in 2013. The contracts - worth an estimated £7.2 million - were awarded to the *Cyrenians*, *St Basil's*, *Midland Heart*, *Elysian Fields* and *Valley House*, a unit specifically to support young families and those suffering domestic abuse.⁷

Cyrenians won three contracts. At that time they had twenty-five places at the YPDA. The contract meant that this increased to eighty-four places citywide. Needs of the young people coming to them were inadequately assessed and referrals incomplete, people with high needs were not identified, leading to thousands of pounds worth of damage to properties and serious safety issues for both staff and other residents. A member of staff was hospitalised.

They gave up their contract in February 2014 and now have no beds specifically for young people. The loss of the contract with the *Cyrenians* has left a gap in provision and in emergencies young people have been accommodated in Bed & Breakfast if the alternative is street homelessness. 18 young people were accommodated in this way from 1st April 2015 to 10th August 2015.⁸ The council recognise that this is not only expensive but also unsuitable for the young person. They wish to re-negotiate their contract with the *Salvation Army* to include under 25s to avoid this.⁹

St Basils won a contract for floating support services. When a young person approaches the local authority for help they are assessed and then referred to *St Basil's* for further assessment. However, this single point of access has led to an increase in young people accessing Coventry Night Shelter as a consequence of them being assessed as ineligible for assistance.¹⁰

⁷ Information on contract holders via Coventry City Council website. Contract COV2046, due for re tender on 30/11/2017.

⁸ Freedom of Information Act request – question 'How many homeless young people are in emergency accommodation such as bed and breakfasts?'

⁹ Cabinet report from Coventry City Council, 20/01/2015. 'Council tender for supported accommodation for young people age 16-24'

¹⁰ Public report from Coventry City Council 'Six month implementation report on supported accommodation and floating support for homeless service', 14/11/2014



Getting help from Coventry City Council

In Coventry, there is a single point of referral for anyone who becomes homeless and approaches the local authority: *Spire House* on New Union Street in the city centre. There is **no drop-in service**, and applicants are interviewed by phone and not assessed face-to-face for eligibility, meaning another party cannot assist with the application if need necessitates.

At this stage, young people under 18 should be referred to Children's Services. In the experience of *Bardsley*, this does not appear to be happening in many cases.

All young people, both under and over 18 are referred to *St Basils* who have the contract to co-ordinate help and support for homeless young people and do a full assessment of needs.

For the over 18s this sometimes does not flow as easily as it should.

'I didn't have a working phone or address which made communication with Spire House very difficult and they wouldn't allow me to give the address of Bardsley House or their phone number. Over the next few weeks I heard nothing despite eventually being able to give a phone number and going to register homeless five times – each time the housing team claimed to have never heard of me before. Eventually the team at Bardsley Youth Project contacted the youth housing team at St Basils who informed them they had never been given my referral despite me being 19 at the time and I should have been referred immediately to them as the co-ordinators of youth accommodation in the city.'

Age Matters

What happens at age 16-17 can have a dramatic impact on your status and what happens after age 18.

A young person under 18 is a child, and approaching the local authority must have an initial assessment from Children's Services unless 'they are able to determine very quickly that the young person is not homeless and does not require support'¹¹.

At age 16 or 17, there are two ways of getting help if you are homeless. You can ask to be helped under the Homeless Act legislation by homeless services, or as a child under the Children's Act 1989 by social services. Your options and the consequences of your decision should be fully explained to you.

¹¹ DCLG (2006) *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities*



However, in a report by *Homeless Link* using Freedom of Information Act data, the responses indicate that over half of young people under 18 (59% in 2012/13) who approached councils with housing needs were referred directly to Housing Options instead of Children's Services. Moreover, less than half of young people were referred to Children's Services at any time during their assessment process.¹² This appears to be happening in Coventry to some of our young people.

'I became homeless in September 2010 and remained homeless until April 2011. I was not given the opportunity to be a looked after child under the Children's Act. In fact Social Services didn't even try to get in contact with me until three weeks before my 18th birthday.

Despite registering with Spire House (Coventry City Council) in September I didn't hear from anyone till December when I was given a nights accommodation at the YPDA before being turned back out onto the streets in the middle of winter with snow on the ground and no coat.'

Young people often reject the Children's Act option as they see it as 'being taken into care' and have already been free of adult supervision by the time they approach the local authority, but if they have at least 14 weeks in care before the age of 18 they become a care leaver and therefore in 'priority need' for housing as an adult. Also, their living costs are on a firmer footing, as social services are responsible for paying the bills and not the young person. This is rarely explained to young people, so consequently they often do not get referred to Children's Services, as they should.

If you are under 17 and your parent/guardian is still willing to house you, you must return home, as no other option will be offered to you if you do not.

Recent research by *Crisis* using mystery shoppers found evidence of 'gate keeping'. Young people (played by actors) were turned away by local authorities without being offered an interview, information or assistance if they could not prove they were homeless, nor were they asked why they were homeless. Young people also explained that some parents will not admit to throwing out their child, particularly if they were concerned about custody of younger children, yet will not allow the young person back into the family home.¹³

¹² *'No Excuses, Preventing homelessness for the next generation', report from Homeless Link, 2013*

¹³ *'Turned Away: the treatment of single homeless people by local authority services in England' report by Crisis, October 2014*



I am Homeless – I don't know what to do

Young people face a multitude of hurdles and often no-one to help face them.





Scale of Youth Homelessness in Coventry

There are no statistics available about homeless young people who are not in 'priority need' applying for help in Coventry, as there is no legal requirement for the council to record this data, and not all young people approach the council for help. Between April 1st and August 10th 2015, 67 young people age 18-25 were assessed as homeless.¹⁴ In addition, in the last year to August 2015, 19 young people were found to be ineligible for statutory support, including those who were 'homeless, eligible, in priority need but intentionally so; homeless, eligible but not in priority need and not homeless'¹⁵ These figures do not reflect the experience of providers.

Number of young people receiving help July 2015

Provider	Supported accommodation	Floating Support
St Basil's	0	75 (44 new in May & June)
Crisis Coventry	0	128 seen last year
Cyrenians	75 approx.	
Coventry Foyer	63	
Coventry YMCA	74 (40 more planned)	
Elysian Fields	15	

So at least 217 young people living in accommodation provided for the homeless and 75 being supported outside of this that we know about.

Coventry City Council contracted out 160 supported accommodation beds in 2013, and demand has been 260 since these contracts began. There is a recognised need for more.

Bardsley saw four new cases of homelessness in the second week of July.

The actual numbers are difficult to ascertain, but in a recent Public Report by Coventry City Council, there were 127 young people aged over 18 that have been accommodated in the period December 2013 to January 2015.¹⁶

In a national survey of forty local authorities and more than 2,000 young people aged 16-25, *Cambridge University's Centre for Housing and Planning Research* found:

- **83,000** young people had to rely on councils and charities for housing during the past year, **more than three times** the figure recognised by the government as homeless.

¹⁴ Freedom of Information Act request 0 Question 'How many young people age 18-25 are currently homeless in Coventry?'

¹⁵ Freedom of Information Act request – Question 'How many applications for registration by young people age 18-25 in the last year have not been found eligible for support?'

¹⁶ Coventry City Council Public Report 'Supported accommodation for young people age 16-24', 20/01/2015



Youth Homelessness in Coventry – What can we do?

- It is estimated that in the last year around **1.3 million** young people aged 16-24 have slept rough or in an unsafe place, and just under **300,000** are doing so on any one night.
- Around **a third of young people** (not currently homeless) said they had sofa-surfed at some point, which would suggest over a million nationally.
- There are **35,000** young people under 21 in homeless accommodation at any one time.¹⁷

Other research indicates that over half of people seeking help with homelessness from local authorities are under 25, and they make up over half of those living in homeless accommodation.¹⁸

At the same time the number of 16 to 24 year olds accepted as homeless by local authorities has steadily decreased since 2006.¹⁹ Because of the way homelessness is assessed, only 'statutory homelessness' is recorded, and the vast majority of single young people approaching the local authority for help are not defined as such.

¹⁷ 'Estimating the scale of youth homelessness in the UK' Cambridge Centre for Housing Planning & Research report, July 2015

¹⁸ Quoted in 'Young and Homeless', annual report by Homeless Link, November 2014

¹⁹ Quoted in 'Young and Homeless', annual report by Homeless Link, November 2014



Available Accommodation

Supported Housing

Young people under 25 may get supported housing in *The Foyer* or *YMCA*. *Coventry Cyrenians* will also find accommodation for young people and give floating support. The young person must have access to public funds and for some providers, cannot have reduced benefits due to rent arrears. 57% of homeless young people are NEET (not in education, employment nor training) and 50% lack independent living skills.²⁰ These are projects that not only give the young person a roof over their heads but also provide training in the skills needed to live independently when they leave and gain employment or training.

Living in supported accommodation and participating in programs may result in the young person moving up the grading bands for social housing. It may also mean that they are entitled to higher levels of housing benefit when they leave.

The provider will find follow-on accommodation, but this is in short supply. The maximum that young people can stay in supported housing is two years as benefit stops for the support element. However, some young people who leave supported housing are not able to cope and lose their tenancies due to rent arrears or not looking after the rented accommodation properly. If this happens, they run the risk of being labelled 'intentionally homeless' and therefore entitled to no support from the local authority. This leads to a cycle of homelessness that can continue for many years.

Half of all homeless people first become homeless aged under 21, with the majority going through the experience again and again because they don't get the help they need.²¹

Social Housing

Young people can be accommodated in bed-sits or one-bedroom flats as these become available and the young person is at the top of the banding grades on *Homefinder*, the social housing portal. The top banding grades are for those in 'priority need'.

There are currently over 30,000 people waiting for social housing in Coventry. Each applicant is graded in bands according to need. Single homeless young people over 18 who are not in 'priority need' have virtually no chance of being offered accommodation.

²⁰ 'Young and Homeless', annual report by Homeless Link, November 2014

²¹ "Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain", report from Cardiff University for Crisis, December 2014



Private rented accommodation

The extension of the single room rate for housing benefit to age 35 has severely reduced the availability of private rented accommodation available to young people. Also, Coventry has two universities and students pay more for a room. The benefit rate does not cover the full cost of renting a room so most landlords who have mortgages to pay do not want tenants on benefits for fear of rent arrears. Young people do not have the funds for the deposit and bond, making tenancy even more risky for the landlord. Proposed changes to housing benefits announced in the July 2015 budget statement will also deter landlords from housing those under 21.

The accommodation available and affordable to young people in the private sector is often poor quality. In Coventry, *Cyrenians* and also *St Basils* work with some landlords to ensure a certain standard of accommodation, but this is limited and both organisations would like to work with more landlords willing to house homeless people. Working with, and sometimes letting a property to, an organisation is a good option for a private landlord who has the desire to help homeless people.

Emergency Accommodation

Homeless provision for young people is in many cases at near capacity, so sometimes there is a delay of several weeks before something is sorted out.

There are no emergency beds specifically for young people in Coventry where they can be accommodated while this process is going on.

Coventry Night Shelter will take young people overnight who are sleeping rough during the winter months, but this is not ideal. Adult hostels will only take over 25s, although there is some provision for young women suffering domestic abuse²². The *Salvation Army Life House* should only take those over 25, but regularly accommodates between four and twelve young people on camp beds in its night shelter whilst other accommodation is sought. These are young people referred from *St Basil's* who are not in priority need. This is far from ideal, as the young people are exposed to an often frightening environment of drug users, alcoholics and sex workers. The usual length of stay is five to six nights, but can be as long as two months in some circumstances. Floating support is provided by *St Basil's*.

St Basil's want to set up a 'Night Stop' type scheme and also a 'supported lodging' scheme but they are finding it difficult in Coventry to get these started.

'Night Stop' provides emergency beds for young people in volunteers' homes for seven days to six weeks. It is overnight only and the young person must leave the house each morning. Volunteers are paid for their support. Rigorous

²² Information from Coventry City Council website



risk assessments are needed and training for volunteers. (*Redditch Nightstop*, Appendix, page 25)

'Supported lodging' is also in volunteers' homes for six to nine months. It is a way of providing a stable family environment for young people that they may otherwise have lacked. Support is offered to both the young person and the volunteer by the arranging organisation, as are risk assessments and thorough background checks.

Financial Considerations

Current Situation

Homeless young people under the age of 18 cannot ordinarily claim benefits. They are children, and any support is from social services as a 'looked after child'. However, if they are not under the care of Children's Services, they cannot usually get Job Seekers Allowance, income support nor housing benefit.

The current situation for young people over 18 is poor and is likely to worsen after the July 2015 budget announcements.

Currently, the housing benefit payment for under 35s in Coventry is the single room rate of £65.65 per week. The cost of a single room in a private rented shared house is at least £80. Job Seekers Allowance is usually £57.90 per week, making it difficult for the young person to make rental top-up payments.

Living in accommodation registered as supportive means that this is topped up to provide this support - £170 to £220 per week depending on the level of support. In all supported accommodation the young person is expected to pay a small charge themselves out of their other benefits.

Some supported housing schemes will not take those who have rent arrears with social housing providers, as these will be deducted from the benefits paid, reducing the amount that can be paid to the project.

Most supported housing providers also increase the expected weekly contribution the young person makes once the young person gets employment. Bearing in mind the minimum wage for under 21s is at most £5.13 per hour (only £3.79 for under 18s) this can be very worrying for the young person and a disincentive to gain employment. However, most providers have a sliding scale of charges dependent on earnings. Housing benefit is still paid if you are on a low income and there is some support for young people to attend training schemes and college. The apprenticeship rate is £2.73 per hour if under 19, leaving finances even tighter.



The Future - planned changes to benefits

2015

The first change will be the introduction of **Universal Credit** to Coventry, probably in December 2015. Universal Credit sounds an excellent idea in theory. The claimant gets one single payment every four weeks to cover all of their benefits, including housing benefit. They have an online account where they can report any work they have done so that the payments can be adjusted accordingly, simply and easily. This should encourage part-time working and budgeting.

The way Universal Credit is paid can lead to inherent problems

- Benefits claimants are used to being paid every two weeks, and some struggle to make their benefits last that long. Making a small amount of money last for a month will be very difficult.
- Housing benefit cannot be paid direct to the landlord; the claimant has to pay their rent out of the single payment. Rents are normally charged per calendar month and Universal Credit is every four weeks, so there is already a built in tendency to get out of step with payments.
- For many young people, budgeting is a real problem and the temptation of a large sum of money once a month may lead to poor monetary decisions.
- Universal Credit must be managed online but many young people do not have access.
- Claimants must sign a contract to commit to spending 35 hours per week looking for a job. Not being able to prove compliance with this contract leads to a significant risk of up to 100% benefit sanctions.

“If you’re left without money, no phone, no Internet access, unable to bathe, feed yourself, pay for the bus fares to interviews, you’re looking dishevelled, how can you fulfil the job search requirements?”²³

Universal credit has been rolled out gradually across the country, and on the whole only to single young claimants. The introduction of Universal Credit has not gone well in many areas. Some claimants have been waiting five to six weeks from their initial application to the first payment. Many applicants have been wrongly sanctioned due to poor system design and computer error. The full online account system has not been rolled out in many areas due to problems.

Where Universal Credit is in operation, rent arrears are common - 63% of private landlords said that some tenants were in arrears. Of this group of landlords, 85% had contacted the DWP to have the housing element of Universal Credit paid directly to them. This has led to several weeks of delay in payments. Many of these private sector landlords are owners of just one or

²³ Steve Cullen, Citizens Advice, quoted in ‘Coalition Britain: after the teething problems, will Universal Credit work?’ The Guardian, 11/03/2015



two houses, making it very difficult for them to keep up mortgage repayments. These initial experiences will lead to even less private landlords being willing to house benefit claimants²⁴.

2017

In April 2017, the announced withdrawal in the July 2015 Budget of automatic right to housing benefit for under 21s will come into force.²⁵ All homeless charities are expecting an increase in youth homelessness because of these cuts.

'I want us to end the idea that aged 18 you leave school, go and leave home, claim unemployment benefit and claim Housing Benefit. We should not be offering that choice to young people.'

David Cameron, 2014

However, a recent report by the YMCA challenges the assumption that young people make this life style choice.

'The evidence in this research shows that the results being sought by removing automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit are largely already happening. Increasing numbers of young people are now staying at home for longer and opting not to claim benefits, while the small numbers that do leave home and claim are increasingly doing so for shorter periods of time.'

For a significant number of young people that are claiming both unemployment benefits and Housing Benefit, it is not a choice. Instead it is due to them having a clear need for support – whether that is having to look after a child, having recently left care, having been made homeless, living in supported accommodation or being estranged from their family.'

To believe that removing entitlement to Housing Benefit will drive all young people to 'earn or learn' is to misunderstand many of those that rely upon this part of the social security system. It is also to underestimate how important having a stable and safe home is in enabling these vulnerable young people to find training and employment.'

*By removing automatic entitlement to Housing Benefit for 18 to 21 year olds the Government could be in danger of inadvertently taking away support from the young people who need it most, and in doing so, exposing many more vulnerable young people to the risk of becoming homeless and therefore damaging their prospects of finding work in the future.'*²⁶

Opting to live on benefits is not attractive as the current rates are so low. Most young people who currently get help with housing costs have already been recognised as 'priority need', and help will continue for these as they are

²⁴ 'Ian Duncan-Smith's Universal Credit: bad for landlords, worse for tenants.' Article in New Statesman, 20/03/2015

²⁵ Policy Paper 'Summer Budget 2015', 08/07/2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/summer-budget-2015/summer-budget-2015>

²⁶ 'Uncertain Futures: a report examining the impact of removing automatic entitlement to housing benefits for 18 to 21 year olds', YMCA, August 2015



Youth Homelessness in Coventry – What can we do?

protected in law. For example, 3 out of 5 young people currently claiming housing benefit live in social housing and therefore have 'priority need' as getting social housing is very difficult for young people.

The YMCA is calling for measures to be put in place to ensure that the most vulnerable young people continue to get housing benefit in their time of need and as a minimum young people that are pregnant, have dependant children, are care leavers, are estranged from their parents or are homeless will get help.



Core Recommendations

Recommendation One – work with young people age 18 and over.

The young people who suffer the most are those who are adults and have no reason to be classed as 'priority need' so have no recourse to statutory help to be housed. The current system of determining statutory homelessness means this will be the case for many young people over 18. They also have the least amount of financial support.

Recommendation Two – work in partnership.

Youth homelessness is a complex issue. As a church and youth centre, we have only experienced the tip of these complexities. Whatever project we decide to do will be more sustainable and give us the back up we need if we work in partnership.

All groups I have met have put in place rigorous risk assessment and safe guarding procedures that ensure the safety of both the homeless person and staff and volunteers. These have developed over a period of years and experience. Any project can be put at serious risk from just one homeless young person being misplaced or having unpredictable behaviours.

There is no point in reinventing the wheel. *Coventry YMCA, St Basil's* and *Cyrenians* have all expressed an interest in exploring partnership working. *Green Pastures* is also an option.

Recommendation Three – Build Relationships.

All of the organisations I have spoken with say that outcomes are dependant on relationships. If the young person already has, or can develop, a relationship with the support or accomodation provider, the outcome is more positive. Whatever we decide to do, if we work with young people we already have relationships with it will be more succesful.

It is also important to develop relationships with those organisations already working in the field so that there is joined up thinking and provision.



Project Options

In my research I have identified three areas of lack in provision in Coventry that we could help with

- Advocacy
- Follow-on accommodation after supported housing
- Emergency accommodation

Option One – Youth Homeless Hub

This is a model practised by *Doorway* in Nuneaton (Appendix, page 23). Homeless young people can get the help they need, but it is often fragmented and involving several different agencies, leading to delays. *Bardsley Youth Project* is already set up to support young people in a holistic way, pulling together many needs and adapting support to each individual. At Bardsley House we have a food bank, clothing bank and furniture and household goods project. We have a shower room. We already provide 1:1 support.

A natural progression of this support would be to widen it to include

- A worker to manage the hub who is trained to advocate for young people as they navigate the system and to provide any practical, spiritual and emotional support necessary
- Work to prevent homelessness by informing young people of the consequences and also family reconciliation work
- A laundry room
- Clear and targeted information about options available to young people
- Access to the internet and phone
- Active liaison with existing agencies working in this area
- New volunteers as the work expands

Pros

- Funding can possibly be raised for a worker as it is a new innovative project
- Relatively inexpensive
- Existing relationships with young people mean that we are well known and trusted to work with them

Cons

- Demand is considerable and could rapidly expand
- If not Bardsley House, funding will need to be found for another venue in the city centre
- Grant funding will be required for a worker
- Mission drift for *Bardsley Youth Project* – this may become all encompassing
- Staff and volunteers at Bardsley may be stretched too far
- Cathedral owns Bardsley House and may have other plans.



Option Two – Crash-Pad

There is no emergency accommodation in Coventry specifically for young people, leaving them very vulnerable and exposed to unsuitable environments. The 'night stop' type scheme is risky and requires a lot of work to set up. For example, *Redditch Nightstop* (Appendix, page 25) was established in 1997, but still struggles to recruit volunteers. A 'crash pad' in a secure location for up to six young people not in someone's home would be a better alternative. This could possibly be at Bardsley House. *St Basil's* and *Doorway* have experience in crash-pad provision.

Pros

- Avoids the need for young people to stay in a stranger's home
- Provides a safe place for young people in immediate need
- Allows *Urban Hope* and *Bardsley Youth Project* to practically respond to immediate need
- Other agencies in Coventry would be supportive as there is a clear need

Cons

- Bardsley House is owned by the Cathedral and approval needs to be sought from the Cathedral Chapter
- Practicalities of using Bardsley House and also running the youth centre there
- Practicalities of building alterations
- Safeguarding issues and staffing
- Access needs to be available at short notice, 24/7, including overnight
- Funding for staff
- Management of crash-pads has proved difficult for some agencies

Option Three – Family House

Several of the agencies I have spoken to recognise that many of the young people they work with lack the skills to live in a household shared with others. This will be the type of accommodation they will start off in - a single room in a shared house. Some young people leaving supported accommodation after two years are still not ready to go it alone.

Most agencies also stress the importance of relationships with young people and regular supervisory visits, preferably daily, as several young people living together can mean bad and destructive behaviour. A house with resident house parents will provide an environment where life skills can be learnt, they can be encouraged to have a purpose to the day and be mentored, as well as kept an eye on and positive behaviour encouraged.

The house could be bought and set up with the help and support of *Green Pastures*. (Appendix, page 28) This would give us the back up and knowledge of an experienced agency.



Pros

- Supportive and enabling environment
- Community living with responsibilities and chores
- Mentoring and purposeful environment
- Young people are supervised reducing bad and destructive behaviour
- Young people are more likely to participate in training and activities as relationship is present with the house parents

Cons

- Funding to buy the right property with accommodation for house parents
- Salaries of house parents – approx £20k on top of free accommodation and bills
- Funding and skills for maintenance and furnishings
- Finding the right people to be house parents
- Complex registration as a social housing provider so that young people will get guaranteed enhanced housing benefit payments
- Legal requirements eg HMO (House of Multiple Occupation) registration, increasingly opposed in planning permissions if not already agreed
- Uncertainty of housing benefit provision after April 2017

Partnership with *Green Pastures* will help with the legal and practical issues. In brief, we find the house, they buy the house and lease it to us. Rents need to cover our lease payments. Major building work is done by *Green Pastures*, and we are responsible for minor repairs. They help set up all the legal paperwork and agreements with our tenants. However, we have to agree to fund raise for them.

Another option would be to find private landlords who would be interested in supporting homeless young people and working in partnership with them, particularly as the young people will be directly supervised. *St Basil's* and *Cyrenians* have experience in this.

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Appendix - Agency Summaries

Doorway Nuneaton

Web: www.doorway.org

Doorway was set up in 1997 and has shop front premises in the town next to the main shopping centre. They provide a central hub in Warwickshire for any person under 25 who becomes homeless, is threatened with homelessness or wants housing advice.

On-site services include a food bank, provision starter packs of bedding and household goods (much donated by the local *Wilkinson's*) and interview clothes – 'Dress to Impress'. There are computers for the young people to use and a shower room.

They have 11 staff and are funded by grants and small fundraising events locally. They are well known in the area, mainly owing to the publicity they have received via *Children in Need*.

Doorway runs one crash-pad bed in Nuneaton with a two weeks maximum stay. They are developing crash-pads in Atherstone & Stratford, hoping to have five all over Warwickshire.

In addition, they do homelessness prevention workshops in secondary schools, funded by the local authority – prevention is one of the key aims of most local authorities.

The Housing Service provides housing advice, mediation, benefits advice & help. This service also recruits and liaises with private landlords.

14 private landlords are signed up and most have been with them ten years or more. This gives 58 bed spaces in 4-5 bed houses. *Doorway* provides floating support. There are no administration fees charged to the landlord in return for no bonds required, rent collection, initial inspection with the council and sorting out tenancy problems. There is no 'dead time' for the landlord when a tenant leaves as *Doorway* has a waiting list. No property management is done by *Doorway*.

Housing benefit topped up with Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) pays the rent. The tenancy agreement is between landlord & tenant, not with *Doorway*. The young people sign an Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) Agreement or a Licence if under 18. Young people are told they must engage with support services, but in actuality this is unenforceable. The longer the young person is on the waiting list, the better the outcome, as relationship with *Doorway* has been built up before they move in. Evictions are low – most problems are sorted out working with the young people. They have only had to go to court for an eviction once in 10 years.



Crisis Skylight Coventry & Warwickshire

Web: www.crisis.org.uk/pages/crisis-skylight-crisis-skylight-coventry-warwickshire-62570.html

An outreach service to single homeless people and those at threat of homelessness, based in the Canal Basin. They saw 500 people last year of which 104 were under 21. They have no accommodation.

Referrals come from other agencies or direct, usually by e-mail. The person is fully assessed to ascertain what their needs are – it is rarely just the lack of a home. *Crisis* have lots of courses to support the eventual outcome of the tenant living independently, but have to work with some for several years to get to that stage. These include budgeting, cooking and personal development according to need. They work with a coaching scheme model on a one-to-one basis.

As part of a national charity, they have a lot of resources and are interested in partnering with those who also work in the field. Their coaches are fully trained and funded so could be a valuable resource for us.

A new scheme - *Renting Ready* – is planned for this year, teaching homeless people all they need to know to have their own place or live in a shared house.

Their biggest need is for accommodation for 6 to 12 months that is secure so the tenant can get support with other needs from *Crisis* coaches. It is always a struggle to get accommodation for single homeless people in private rented accommodation.

St Basil's

Web: www.stbasils.org.uk/st-basils-in-your-area/coventry

St Basil's came to Coventry in 2013 and have a contract with Coventry City Council until December 2016 to provide floating homeless support and services to young people under 25. They do not have any accommodation in the city, but in Birmingham they house 400 young people every night.

The centre in Spon End is the referral point from the council for all young people under 25 who need housing. A young person cannot approach *St Basil's* direct. They provide floating support for 75 young people in their own homes who are at risk of homelessness and young people who are 'sofa surfing', and had 17 new referrals in May 2015 and 27 in June.

The young people are assessed to discover their needs and then referred on to supported housing providers or accommodation found.



As they have been successful in attracting private landlords in Birmingham, they are trying to do the same in Coventry. However, in 18 months they have only one landlord willing to work with them. *St Basil's* would also like to set up a 'night stop' type scheme and also a 'supported lodging' scheme but interest so far in Coventry is low.

Their 'Fair Chance' Scheme works with young people who are NEET and not eligible for state services as they are not a priority need. However, funding for this runs out in December 2015.

Their most pressing need is for accommodation for young people assessed as having high needs as most supported accommodation in Coventry is for low to medium needs.

Redditch Nightstop

Web: www.redditchnightstop.co.uk

Redditch Nightstop was set up in 1997 and is based in the main shopping centre. They provide emergency accommodation for young people under 25 in volunteers' homes.

They currently have 14 hosts who are paid £120 per week to host. Accommodation is overnight only, and a volunteer from *Nightstop* drops off in the evening and picks up the young person in the morning. The arrangement may be for up to six weeks. Hosts are trained in drug abuse and first aid as well as their responsibilities. *Nightstop* develop relationships with their hosts so that confidence is built up.

They also provide supported lodgings for six to nine months. Floating support is provided by *Nightstop*. Host households are chosen for their stability and calm family atmosphere and this often has a positive effect on the young person who may never have lived in a stable household before.

Nightstop also run a *Lifewise* course that is accredited by *Centre Point*. This course teaches the skills needed to live independently.

They are affiliated and use the systems of *De Paul* (<http://www.depauluk.org>) In 2014 *Nightstop* nationwide provided 13,500 bed nights and volunteer hosts gave over 200,000 hours of their time. However each *Nightstop* is responsible for its own fundraising.

Coventry & Warwickshire YMCA

Web: ymca-cw.org.uk

The YMCA is the largest provider of supported accommodation for young people in Coventry with 74 beds and 40 more planned. They do not have a contract with the council for services so referrals to them can be made direct. They have a centre at Daimler Green for low level support and also St



Margaret's in Stoke for medium level support. They also have follow-on houses in Rotherham Road and Foleshill Road.

Residents can stay for up to two years at St Margaret's and one year at Daimler Green. The supported housing benefit at St Margaret's is £212.42 per week, and residents pay £9.73 weekly. At Daimler Green benefits are £178.91 per week with residents paying £11.55 on top.

The YMCA may not be able to accommodate young people who have rent arrears from social housing as this reduces the payment of benefit.

Support in St Margaret's is more intensive. Programs are designed to meet the individual needs for the resident. Young people sign a licence agreement that they will participate in programs. They are assigned a peer mentor to help them as needed. After three months, the YMCA can recommend to housing services that the young person be given priority banding on *Homefinder* to increase their chances of social housing.

The YMCA are interested in working in partnership with other organisations and their director was very keen to hear of our possible plans.

Coventry Cyrenians

Web: www.coventrycyrenians.co.uk

Based in offices right next door to the Job Centre, *Cyrenians* are a large provider of accommodation and services for homeless people – 130 beds across the city for low to medium support services. The places are usually at full capacity – only 9 places were available at the end of July. They do not have any specific beds for young people, but approximately half of all those seeking help from them are under 25. The YPDA on Holyhead Road used to be specifically for young people but is no longer. They can be approached direct or by referral from other agencies.

From application to accommodation can be as little as 24 hours. Before accommodation is offered, there is a rigorous risk assessment and checking process of applicants via the Probation Service. This is the case even with emergency accommodation, as the wrong person in the wrong place can put others at risk.

They own shared houses and find that putting all young people together can cause problems, so often mix the ages in a house. Each person is placed in the best accommodation for them that is available. The resident pays £12 per week and this includes utilities and support. Housing benefit from each resident is the single room rate of £65.65.

They have one private landlord working with them at the moment with an eight-bedroom house in Earlsdon, but would like more.



They find that close working with people placed in accommodation is best. Their houses are run as 'family' houses with daily visits to each house by one of five workers who have 30 cases each. Support plans for each individual are based on ten different areas – offending, motivation and taking responsibility, self care and living skills, managing money, social networks and relationships, drug and alcohol misuse, physical health, emotional and mental health, meaningful use of time, and managing tenancy.

They have a young people's Drug & Alcohol Mediation Service.

The *Cyrenians* are also keen to work closely with partner organisations.

Coventry Foyer

Web: <http://www.coventryfoyer.org>

The Foyer is run by *Midland Heart*, just off Spon Street, with 63 bed-sits. They have a contract until December 2017 to provide young people under 25 with low to medium level supported housing, so cannot accept referrals direct.

Foyers are similar to hostels and offer affordable accommodation for young people who are homeless or in housing need, and want to develop skills and prepare for living independently. Each young person has a support worker who works out what they need to achieve this and The Foyer is staffed 24 hours a day.

Young people need to pay £7.50 per week out of their benefits plus utility bills. If they are working, this will be increased depending on wages. There is no food provided. The maximum stay is two years, and Foyer staff will find follow on accommodation.

Bardsley Youth Project run a drop-in at the Foyer on Fridays, started as an opportunity for young people to talk to, and gain support from, another adult apart from their support worker.

St Mary's Church, Leamington

Web: <http://www.stmarysleamington.com>

Work with the homeless began in 2013 when a local businessman offered £200k as a response to need arising out of their *Pathway* project, a mentoring service for adults with drug & alcohol problems. Their first thought was to buy a house, but on developing relationships with a local estate agent this changed to help with deposits for private rented accommodation. The scheme is currently managed by the *Pathway Project* manager

Authorities in Leamington maintain that there are no rough sleepers in the town, but this is not the case. Rents in Leamington are twice what they are in Coventry and there is not much social housing, leading to acute problems.



After a rigorous risk assessment and checks via MAPPA (Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements), suitable accommodation is found and the finance lent to the homeless person for deposits and rent, a total of £1000 to £1500. The homeless person then pays *St Mary's* back over time and most do, but with some defaulters. The church underwrites the bond and puts right any damage.

Relationship with the homeless person is very important, as this brings a better outcome. Housing is often only one of a person's problems, so support is needed to maintain tenancies, with debt relief, drug & alcohol problems, mental health problems and social issues. *St Mary's Pathway Project* provides this support.

Green Pastures

Web: www.greenpastures.net

A national Christian social enterprise, housing and supporting 600 people through a network of 40 partners. They believe that the church in Britain can end homelessness.

Their funds come from fund raising and also from individuals investing and receiving up to a 5% return on their investment.

The partner finds the house and the residents. *Green Pastures* buy the house and the partner leases it from them and pays the cost of the finance. This means that the house has to have 100% occupancy for most of the time. They pay for major repairs, the partner minor repairs. The partner furnishes the house and provides support to residents to move away from homelessness to independent living.

They have a great deal of support on their website on how to do this at every level from viewing the property, building regulations, housing law, rental agreements etc and offer ongoing support at no charge.

They have no partners in our area. They have no schemes specifically for young people. They have accepted us as potential partners.

The partner agrees to sign up 10 'Good Samaritans' in the first year to give £1 per week regularly to *Green Pastures* and 5 each year thereafter. This may be difficult for us given the nature of *Urban Hope*. Alternatively, the partner agrees to fundraise for them – they prefer the *Good Samaritan* scheme as this means regular predictable income.

The partner needs a team of committed volunteers – admin needs 1 or 2 volunteers, maintenance needs 1 or 2 volunteers, pastoral care needs 3 or 4 volunteers. There could be some overlap in these roles.



Salvation Army – Harnall Life House

Harnall Life House just off Foleshill Road accommodates those age 25 and over and ex-offenders age 18 and over. It also has a night shelter for rough sleepers that operates from 6pm to 12 noon every day, with breakfast provided. Users of the night shelter cannot stay outside of these hours.

They have neither support nor accommodation for under 25's. However, for compassionate reasons they accommodate young people on camp beds in their night shelter when there is no alternative. These are young people referred by *St Basil's* who have been found to be ineligible for statutory support. They accommodate between four and twelve young people at any one time, the average being six.

St Basil's provide weekly floating support, but this is often missed and patchy, so the Life House has a worker who specialises in youth homelessness even though this is not their specific remit. The Life House recognises that they are not an ideal place for young people.

Young people who come into the *Life House* with low support needs are at significant risk of becoming medium to high need. This is due to the accommodation not being separate from other residents, leading to inappropriate exposure to adults with drug and alcohol problems. The Life House also has a significant number of residents who are sex workers, and young people have been drawn into this life style as a result of contact.

Young people stay for five or six days whilst *St Basil's* are seeking accommodation. However, they currently have one young person who has been accommodated for 42 nights.