



DEPAUL

Homelessness has no place

Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two

**A quantitative exploration of young people's
experience of temporary living**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of the second phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research conducted by homelessness charity Depaul UK.

The first phase, in 2015-16, involved a qualitative exploration of young people's experiences of temporary living between periods of stable accommodation. Based on the findings of that research, Depaul UK proposed a new approach to assessing temporary living circumstances - using the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model.

To further the understanding of young people's experiences and enhance the thinking behind the Model, in 2017 Depaul UK undertook the second phase of Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research: a quantitative survey involving 712 young people aged from 16 to 25 who were receiving help from homelessness organisations.

Below are key findings of the second phase of the Danger Zones and Stepping Stones research.

Throughout the report we have used the term "temporary living arrangements" to denote places young people stay for periods of up to six months while out of stable accommodation. "Service-provided accommodation" means all formal housing solutions provided by statutory or charitable services, such as hostels or small accommodation projects.

Leaving stable accommodation

The majority (59 percent) of survey respondents lost their stable accommodation when they were younger than 18, and were, therefore, in temporary living arrangements as children.

Young women were found to be more likely to lose stable accommodation at a young age (under 18) than young men.

LGBT young people were more likely than non-LGBT young people to say they had left stable accommodation: to escape emotional or mental abuse (36 percent compared with 17 percent); to escape violent abuse (21 percent compared with 12 percent), or because of their own mental health issues (21 percent compared with eight percent).

The most common reason for losing stable accommodation for the first time was found to be relationship breakdown.

Finding a place to stay

While not in stable accommodation, young people made considerable use of “informal” living arrangements, such as staying with family or friends. To find a place to stay, young people were found to adopt a number of “risky” strategies that may put their safety at risk:

- Twelve percent of survey respondents said they had engaged in sexual activity in exchange for a place to stay.
- This proportion rose considerably for LGBT young people of whom nearly a quarter (23 percent) had engaged in sexual activity in exchange for a place to stay.
- Around one in five (19 percent) of the young people involved in the research had attended an all-night party for somewhere to stay.

Survey respondents had stayed with people they did not know well while out of stable accommodation, with around a quarter (23 percent) having stayed with “friends of friends” and one in 10 (11 percent) with strangers. Young men and young people with a disability or long-term mental health condition were found to be particularly likely to have stayed with people they did not know.

More than a quarter (27 percent) of our sample had slept rough on the streets and almost one in five (18 percent) had slept in a public place such as a train station. Thirty-eight percent of young men were found to have slept rough on the streets compared with 18 percent of young women.

Young people were found to frequently move on from temporary living arrangements because they felt they were a burden on the people with whom they were staying. More than half (53 percent) had left somewhere they were staying for this reason, with 21 percent saying they had done so several times.

Respondents with disabilities or long-term mental health conditions were more likely than others to say they had consistently left places they were staying as they felt they were making life difficult for the person or people they were staying with.

Harm in temporary living arrangements

The following forms of harm were considered:

- Sexual assault or abuse
- Mental or emotional abuse
- Physical assault or abuse
- Pressure to consume alcohol or drugs
- Theft or damage to belongings

More than half (55 percent) of the young people involved in the research had experienced at least one of these forms of harm while in temporary living arrangements.

Twenty-nine percent of young people had experienced mental or emotional abuse, 28 percent had experienced physical assault or abuse, and 25 percent had experienced pressure to consume drugs or alcohol while in temporary living arrangements.

Young people were found to be most at risk of harm while staying in “informal” living arrangements with people they did not know well. Fifteen percent of those who had stayed with strangers had been sexually assaulted or abused while doing so.

Experience of harm was generally lower in service-provided accommodation. Of all the accommodation types considered in the research, young people were least likely to have experienced harm while staying with a member of the community through a service such as Nightstop.

LGBT young people, those who had previously been “looked-after children”, and those with disabilities or long-term mental health issues were found to be particularly likely to experience harm while in temporary living arrangements. Around two-thirds of each of these respondent groups (66 percent, 68 percent and 67 percent, respectively) had experienced some form of harm.

Young women were nearly four times as likely as young men to have had experienced sexual abuse while in temporary living arrangements. Nineteen percent of young women and five percent of young men had experienced sexual abuse.

More than one third (36 percent) of young people experienced theft or damage to property while staying in temporary living arrangements.

Support in temporary living arrangements

Young people were found to be most likely to receive support while in service-provided accommodation that was specifically designed for their age group.

This included both small and large accommodation projects and, to a lesser extent, community solutions such as Depaul UK’s emergency accommodation, Nightstop.

Young people were found to be much less likely to receive support while staying with strangers or in bed and breakfast accommodation. “Informal” arrangements with friends and family appeared far less supportive than all types of service-provided accommodation, including community solutions such as Nightstop.

It should be noted that the research assessed the availability of support only, and not support quality, so no judgments can be made regarding the effectiveness of the support provided by accommodation projects. Furthermore, no distinction was made between emergency and longer-term community solutions (e.g. supported lodgings), between which there could be much variation in support provision.

Impact of temporary living

Temporary living was found to have a considerable negative effect on young people’s lives.

Two-thirds (66 percent) of those involved in the research said that not having a stable place to live had damaged their mental or emotional health, and the majority (55 percent) said that their physical wellbeing had been negatively affected by temporary living.

Nearly half (48 percent) said that temporary living had had a negative impact on their relationships and more than four in 10 said it had damaged their education or their ability to find or keep work (42 percent and 43 percent respectively).

Young women, LGBT young people and those with stated vulnerabilities were particularly likely to say temporary living had had a negative impact on their lives.

Recommendations

Following this research, Depaul UK recommends that:

- 1 Central Government and commissioners increase the provision of preventative services, such as family mediation and short respite accommodation, particularly for under-18s.** This would reduce the number of homeless young people in potentially dangerous temporary living arrangements;
- 2 Central Government ensures sufficient and secure funding is made available for supported accommodation projects.** This would prevent young people staying in “informal” arrangements where the risk of harm is higher;
- 3 Commissioners and service providers ensure young people are placed in accommodation specifically designed for them.** In these projects, young people are more likely to receive the support they need to escape homelessness than in all-age projects;
- 4 Further research is undertaken into the experience of particular groups of young people in temporary living arrangements, including young women, LGBT young people, those who had previously been looked-after children, and those with disabilities or long-term mental health issues.** This should help determine how they can be better supported and protected from harm.
- 5 Central government, commissioners and service providers increase the provision of community-based accommodation, such as Nightstop and supported lodgings.** This would help ensure that, where appropriate, this type of safe accommodation is made available for more young people.
- 6 Schools and colleges should ensure more young people are made aware of the dangers of staying with people they don't know.** Young people should also be told of the available alternatives.
- 7 Service providers increase measures to control drug and alcohol use in young people's services.** This could help protect young people from the harms of substance use while they receive the support they need to escape homelessness.
- 8 Commissioners and service providers use the revised Danger Zones and Stepping Stones Model.** This is to identify young people in urgent need of support and prioritise them for crisis accommodation. See p.36-37 of the report.



WE HELP YOUNG PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HOMELESSNESS IN THE UK

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