

Housing Needs and Experiences

PPRG

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Glossary

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ASBO – Anti Social Behaviour Order

Asset – the structured assessment profile used by YOTs in England and Wales. It contains 13 sections covering ‘static’ and ‘dynamic’ factors considered to be linked with young people’s offending behaviour. Practitioners are required to rate, using 0 (no association) to 4 (a strong association) the extent to which each section is associated with the likelihood of future offending (Baker et al, 2002).

Careworks (see also YOIS) - Electronic monitoring system used by Youth Offending Teams

Disposal – A sanction (given either by the Court or the Police) to someone who admits or is found guilty of an offence; for example, Reprimand, Attendance Centre Order or Detention and Training Order.

DTO – Detention and Training Order (see Disposal)

ISSP – Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Order (see Disposal)

Schedule 1 offence/offender – A Schedule 1 offender is an individual who has committed one of the crimes listed in Schedule 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 (subsequently amended), where the victim is a child or a young person. In July 2005¹, the DfES replaced the term with that of “risk to children” to describe those persons identified as posing an ongoing risk to children.

Themis – YJB Themis data is compiled from all YOT quarterly returns and is presented in the YJB’s Annual Report. It contains data on the number of offences and disposals processed by each YOT over a given time. It does not, therefore, count by individual offender.

TWOC – Taking Without the Owner’s Consent (relates to theft of vehicles)

WAG – Welsh Assembly Government

YJB – Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

YOI – Young offender institution

YOIS – Electronic monitoring system used by YOTs (see also Careworks)

YOT – Youth offending team

¹ Local Authority Social Services Letter: LASSL (July 2005)

Introduction

Researching the Housing Needs and Experiences of Young Offenders

In 2005 the YJB commissioned a 12 month study to identify the extent to which young offenders' housing needs were being met or failed. It had two principle aims:

- To provide a picture of the housing issues which face young offenders, based on national trends and data collated from YOTs, the secure estate and other specialist agencies. The intention was to investigate the barriers, both visible and hidden, to accessing accommodation.
- To provide an in-depth understanding from the perspective of young people who face accommodation issues in the Youth Justice System and to reflect the views of practitioners and key stakeholders.

The views and experiences of young people, stakeholders and practitioners would be accessed through ten YOT sites. These would be chosen to be geographically representative across England and Wales, including urban and rural areas, different ethnicities, to provide an adequate sample of girls and young women and where there was evidence of young offenders experiencing accommodation difficulties.

Assessing the Number of Young Offenders in Housing Need

Establishing the number of young offenders that are in housing need is difficult, as this information is not specifically asked for within the youth justice context; nor is it collected nationally in any clear or specific way for the general population. The issue is further complicated as this study aimed to identify not only those young offenders who are street homeless, but also those who may experience other forms of homelessness. These may include those who are thrown out of the family home, 'sofa surfing', living in a temporary hostels and homeless accommodation. The reasons for this may include the behaviour of others and the young person's victimisation, their own behaviour, or other family circumstances such as the loss of the family home, family breakdown or bereavement. The difficulties in identifying actual or potential homelessness meant that we had to choose a sampling strategy which was robust, but sensitive enough to this range of factors.

Defining Homelessness

The definitions of homelessness and unsuitable accommodation given below are based on those used by Shelter, were agreed with the YJB and are the ones which formed the basis of understanding for the research and subsequently for this report. We have adapted them to ensure that they are explicit and clear, for young people, YOT practitioners and housing providers:

Homelessness means not having a home. Even if you have a roof over your head you may still be homeless, or may be using homelessness services. This is because you may not have any rights where you live or your home may be unsuitable for you.

According to the Shelter website you may be deemed homeless if you are:

- Temporarily staying with friends or family
- Staying in a hostel / B&B
- Living in very overcrowded conditions
- At risk of violence or abuse in your home
- Living in poor conditions that affect your health
- Living somewhere that you have no legal right to stay
- Living somewhere you can't afford to pay for without depriving yourself of basic essentials
- Forced to live apart from your family or with someone you would normally live with, because your accommodation isn't suitable

Accommodation may be defined as unsuitable on the basis of:

- Rent
- Condition of the property or the suitability of the housing provider
- Size not appropriate to the person's needs
- Location – such as placing a young person at the risk of reoffending / substance misuse / amongst other 'unsuitable' residents
- Social factors, such as distance from family, educational provision, special schools, training or employment opportunities
- The impact on physical, emotional or mental health e.g. difficulty in accessing a property, such as climbing stairs
- Risk of racial harassment/domestic violence
- Lack of appropriate support
- Housing provision does not take into account the wishes / needs of the young person – for example it is too near to (or too far from) family/ support

A Shortage of Suitable Accommodation

There is an acknowledged lack of suitable accommodation for young people and the availability of social housing varies considerably across local authorities in England and Wales. Local authority tenancies are not readily available and even if the criteria for assistance is met under housing legislation it is more likely that temporary rather than permanent accommodation will be offered in the first instance².

Additionally the demand for accommodation that can be accessed through Children's Services far outweighs the supply; in reality this will mean that those aged 14/15 years of age and under are most likely to be prioritised.

The shortage of suitable accommodation and bed spaces in particular also extends to hostels and various forms of temporary accommodation because of high levels of occupancy. This may therefore preclude planning for placements, as the high demand for beds means that places cannot be kept open, unless they are paid for. Housing providers may also be unwilling to take people with a criminal record and young offenders face additional difficulty sometimes as the result of perceptions about their behaviour and ability to successfully maintain a tenancy. This can be the case even when additional support is available through the YOT or other agencies.

Further, other forms of accommodation may not be appropriate for young people, due to the unsuitability of other residents, the fact that they are significantly older or because the accommodation is unsafe and intimidating because of the activities of other residents (Centrepont, 2005).

Entitlement to Benefits

Housing Benefit is designed to help people on low incomes pay rent and ensure that they can access decent housing. However, legislative provisions are built around the expectation that parents will support 16 and 17 year olds; and their entitlement to benefits is therefore restricted. This can be a significant problem for young people who are estranged from their families (Crisis, 2002).

An additional problem with the payment of housing benefit is that it is paid at least four weeks in arrears, which presents difficulties for homeless young people. Furthermore, the payment of housing benefit may stop or the amount paid be reduced when someone starts work. Young people with low or no income can end up in debt due to poor benefits administration (Centrepont, 2005) and the system itself can be daunting. A lack of income can also lead young people to find other sources of income, such as begging, petty crime and casual work (Mental Health Foundation, 2002).

² This also links to the process of assessment the local authority will undertake, whereby it is more likely that an individual will be placed in temporary rather than permanent accommodation, whilst an assessment of their status is being undertaken.

One of the additional problems associated with the payment of housing benefit to young people is that it is restricted for those under 25 years of age to the average rent of a single room in the private sector with shared use of facilities. It can cause difficulties for those in need of housing and can place young people at a disadvantage (JRF, 1998).

Dependency on benefits can also mean that it is difficult to access accommodation, as landlords may not accept people on benefits and may require substantial deposits.

Housing benefit is paid for a maximum of 13 weeks for those sentenced to custody. This substantially diminishes the prospect of retaining accommodation for those serving custodial sentences of six months or more³.

The Use of Temporary Accommodation

It would seem that there has, in the recent past, been a substantial increase in the use of B&B accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 years of age. It is, however, difficult to establish the true picture as data is mainly collected for households placed in B&B by local authorities because they have been accepted as homeless and in priority need⁴. This is despite the fact that the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Guidance is clear that bed and breakfast accommodation is only appropriate in a small number of exceptional cases.

Centrepont (2005) reported on the views of young people placed in B&B accommodation and suggested that they found that it could be an unsafe, intimidating, lonely, dirty place and could lead them to feel insecure. This was related to the witnessing of violence and alcoholism, and the experiences of sexual harassment and being offered drugs.

Nacro Cymru (2006) identified that some young people refused the option of bed and breakfast, and that Housing Departments would then say that they had met their obligations and would not be prepared to consider providing other alternatives. Similarly, JRF (2005) found in a study of care leavers that they had few options in terms of where to live on leaving care and many felt that what they were offered was unsuitable. However they were told that if they did not accept what was offered, they would be put at the bottom of the allocations list and face possible homelessness.

Research undertaken by Nacro Cymru (2005) with YOTs in Wales found that finding suitable alternative accommodation was more difficult for those aged 16 and 17 years. Further, there was a shortage of suitable hostel provision or supported lodgings, and many young people were not considered sufficiently mature to live totally independently. YOTs indicated that the type of accommodation they required most was emergency accommodation for those in crisis, for those likely to be denied bail and for those to be

³ This is because half of the custodial sentence is served in custody

⁴ The total number of homeless people in B&B may be higher than statistics indicate, as it is suggested that some individuals may be self placed.

released from custody. In addition, remand fostering and supported lodgings were also identified. All YOTs commented that what they needed was a range of “*flexible provision to be able to meet the varying range of needs of young people*”.

Identifying Young People with Housing Need

As we have seen identifying young people with housing need, in or out of the youth justice system is not a straightforward task as the data are not collected in any easily identifiable or aggregated form. It was therefore important to devise a sampling strategy which could do this. We chose to focus on three *Asset* domains which appeared likely to identify both those with known housing need and those vulnerable to homelessness, based on what was known about the risk factors for young people in this regard. Those three domains were:

- Living arrangements
- Family and personal relationships
- Neighbourhood

We found that the sampling strategy for this study targeted young offenders with vulnerability to, or known housing issues and was clearly effective in identifying young offenders with accommodation problems. Thus, 75 percent of the sample had lived with someone other than a parent at some time in their lives. Additionally 40 percent were or had been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and / or support.⁵ The sample is therefore substantially different than the general YOT population – for example, the Audit Commission’s (2004) findings indicate that only one third of young people under the supervision of a YOT do not live with their parents. We were therefore able to use the three selected *Asset* domains to identify young people with housing need.

It is also relevant that all interviewees were 18 years or less when interviewed and, at this age, not living with a parent is out of the ordinary and out of keeping with the general population. Unfortunately, there appear to be no clear or directly comparable figures for children and young people⁶ as a whole for the UK but figures for 2001 from the ONS would suggest that within the general population just 1.5 percent of children and young people did not live with a parent and / or lived in a ‘communal’ setting such as children’s

⁵ Our definition includes those who are ‘street’ homeless, those in temporary accommodation and those living independently; this is discussed later in more detail.

⁶ Children and young people are not consistently defined across agencies and organisations that collate or gather information on accommodation status, for example some refer to ‘children’ and others to those under 18. Moreover categories may be confused – on occasions data refer to ‘under 19 years’ and the breakdown across age ranges i.e. 0-5, 5-10, etc is not known which makes it very difficult to offer any real comparison with this sample. What is indicated is that, proportionately, young people in the sample were more likely to live somewhere other than with a parent than would be likely for the general population.

home. Further, figures for 2004 (ONS) suggest that more than 90 percent of those aged 19 and under lived within a 'married couple' family unit or with a 'single parent'.

We were therefore able to effectively identify those with accommodation difficulties and those who met the adapted Shelter definition of 'homelessness'.

Seeking Help or Being Homeless

We sought to break down the variety of experiences which could be found within the sampled population of young offenders with housing need. All of the young offenders in the sample had experienced or were experiencing accommodation problems; we sought to differentiate those who considered they had experienced severe accommodation problems – such that they were no longer living in the family home and had accessed support in relation to their accommodation situation – from the rest of the sample. Consequently, three categories of housing arrangements were grouped together and as we have seen this encompassed 40 percent of the overall sample. The experiences identified from the research as those which had required or received formal support were:

- Being street homeless
- Living in supported or unsupported⁷ accommodation or
- Living alone

This grouping was chosen to reflect the concerns of the young people sampled.

Those young offenders who had lived in supported or unsupported accommodation or who had been housed independently had, at some time, to have accessed housing support and/or formal forms of temporary accommodation because their housing problem had become immediate, such that they could no longer remain in the family home or in local authority care. The other part of this group were those who had either not sought or not received any help and were therefore completely without somewhere to stay and defined as 'street homeless'. It should be remembered that the sample of young offenders interviewed for this study were all aged under 18, thus to have lived in supported or unsupported accommodation, been housed on their own or to have been 'street homeless' indicates a serious housing problem and suggests needs above and beyond the rest of the sample.

⁷ The young offenders interviewed as part of this study were generally unable to differentiate between accommodation which was supposed to be 'supported' e.g. providing them with access to a support worker, and that which was intended to be 'unsupported'. For this reason, the two were amalgamated for the purpose of analysis.

What we could not capture was those ‘living with friends’ or in B&B accommodation⁸; it therefore represents an underestimate of homelessness within the sampled population. In fact, just 25 percent of the young offender sample could be defined as in housing need, but not yet having experienced actual homelessness.

The Research Methods

The research took place in two phases. Phase one involved the identification of ten YOT areas, chosen to reflect the England and Wales and YOT population and geographical structure as far as was possible. We deliberately over-sampled for girls and young women and those from non-white ethnic groups in order to be able to achieve an adequate sample. In all we completed⁹:

- data collection on 259 young people;
- 152 structured interviews with young offenders in the community and custodial settings
- 152 calendars which charted young people’s housing movements over the last year;
- 54 semi-structured interviews with young offenders in the community and custodial settings;
- 64 ‘proxy’ interviews with YOT practitioners where young people could not be interviewed;
- nine 3-6 month follow-up interviews with young offenders in the community and custodial settings;
- 10 focus groups or semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in each site¹⁰.

In Phase Two a review of national trend data was collated, along with the collection of:

- A total of 30 questionnaires with housing providers from the ten areas;
- Youth Justice Plans from 128 YOTs in England and Wales, representing 83 percent of the total available.

⁸ Unfortunately, due to the research tool design we were not able to count incidences of young offenders *ever living* in a B&B or with friends, only incidences within the last 12 months.

⁹ The methodology and methods are described in full in a separate chapter in the Appendix.

¹⁰ Key individuals and organisations involved in housing issues in each of the ten areas with whom the YOT had direct contact were identified by each YOT. They included, amongst others, the YMCA, Shelter, Children and Families Services and other social services departments, local authority housing departments and local voluntary organisations. Thus the young people in the sample often had first hand experience of the housing and support provided by the identified stakeholders. This allowed for a more constructive comparison of the views of the young offenders and stakeholders in the study.

The results have been analysed using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods. The intention is to reflect as fully as possible the views and experiences of young offenders in housing need within the youth justice system.

The Report

Chapter 1 starts by laying out the national context and trends with regard to housing issues within England and Wales at this present time and looks at how YOTs and housing providers say they meet this need. Chapter 2 then considers the sampled population against family and other risk factors which have been identified by previous research as potentially putting a young person at risk of accommodation problems. Subsequently, in Chapter 3 we explore the experiences of young offenders who were or had been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and / or support. In Chapter 4 we look at how young offenders describe accessing accommodation and support. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the housing provider surveys and finally, Chapter 6 presents young people's aspirations for the future and the experiences in more detail of three young people who collectively highlight some of the key issues for young people in the youth justice system.

Chapter 1 – Legislation and the national picture

The aim of this first section of the report is to set the context for the remainder of the report. It will provide a summary of the main legislative provisions and identify local initiatives for tackling homelessness. The chapter will also present a brief overview of national policy in respect of housing and homelessness, making reference to issues that relate to young people specifically. Finally, it will conclude with a summary of the data

Legislation

Statutory responsibilities to young people in need of accommodation fall to local authorities or social services departments through the Children Act 1989, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and housing legislation. One of the functions of the YOT is to ensure that young people gain access to help and assistance through mainstream services when there are difficulties with their living arrangements that clearly relate to criminogenic need. The responsibility to provide those services rests with social services and local authority housing departments.

The Children Act 1989

There are a number of sections of the Children Act 1989 that relate to the duties and powers local authorities have to young people who may be experiencing difficulties with their living arrangements, these are summarised below:

Section 17 of the Act places a duty on Local Authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in their area, and to provide an appropriate range of services for children in need¹¹. The general principle of the Children Act 1989 is that children are best located within their family environment and that if for any reason the family is unable to provide suitable accommodation, they should be assisted in this respect. This should be a first consideration as opposed to taking the young person into the care of the local authority.

There is also provision under this section of the Act for local authorities to provide financial assistance, which can be used to pay for accommodation and to assist young people (and their families) who are experiencing serious hardship or who are destitute.

Under Section 20 of the Act, accommodation can be provided for those up to 16 years of age who have been abandoned by their family or because they are prevented from caring

¹¹ There are, however, no firm criteria relating to what 'in need' means, and as a result it is not necessarily a straightforward process to gain access to relevant services.

for them, because they lack suitable accommodation on a temporary or permanent basis. This can also apply to 16 and 17 years olds whose welfare would be seriously compromised if accommodation was not provided.

Section 21 of the Act also sets out the responsibilities for local authorities for children and young people involved in the criminal justice system in that they receive and provide accommodation for young people who are "*removed or kept away from home*" because they:

- have been detained under section 38 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
- are on remand under section 23 (1) of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969
- are the subject of a supervision order with a residence requirement (section 12AA of the Children and Young Persons Act 1969)

Section 23 sets out the type of accommodation which may be provided by the local authority, which can include being housed with the family, a relative or a member of the extended family, or any other suitable person (such as remand or foster carers or in a residential children's home).

The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000 strengthened local authority responsibilities towards care leavers. It also extended the involvement of the local authority potentially up until the young person is 21 years of age, to assist their transition to independent living. The Act confers a duty on local authorities to financially support and meet the housing needs of 'eligible',¹² and 'relevant'¹³ or 'former relevant',¹⁴ young people up to and including their 18th birthday (HMSO).

These duties apply whether a young person has been accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 or been the subject of a care order. Those who qualify for assistance lose their rights to benefits and to assistance under homelessness legislation until their 18th birthday and have to be supported by social services. Children who have been in the care system are disproportionately likely to become involved in criminal

¹² Eligible children are those that are aged 16 and 17 years of age who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 years of age and who are currently looked after.

¹³ Relevant children are those who are also 16 and 17 years of age, who have been looked after for at least 13 weeks, since their 14th birthday and who have been looked after at some point after their 16th birthday and have left care or would have been a relevant child had they not been detained by the criminal justice system or were in hospital on their 16th birthday.

¹⁴ A former relevant child is a young person who is aged 18 to 21 years of age who has been an eligible or relevant child. There are also young people who have the status of qualifying children who left care after 1 October 2001 after their 16th birthday, but are not eligible or relevant because they had not been in the looked after system for at least 13 weeks, left care before 1 October 2001 or were accommodated in certain types of provision, for example mental health provision or residential education establishments.

activity and the prospect of becoming homeless is substantially higher than the general population, often because they lack emotional support or the practical skills to live independently. The aim of the Act is to provide each young person with a pathway plan to help identify their needs in terms of independent living and an advisor, who will co-ordinate the provision of support and assistance and assist them to make the successful transition to living on their own.

Housing Legislation

The Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1996 placed responsibility on local authority housing departments to assist and provide accommodation for homeless people. The Homelessness Act 2002 amended parts vi and vii of the 1996 Housing Act and lays down a number of duties that are relevant to young people, who may be at risk of or who are homeless. The Homelessness Act introduced new categories of priority needs groups which included certain young people, notably 16 and 17 year olds who have no support networks and have not been relevant or eligible children; care leavers aged 18 to 21 year who have not been former relevant children; those over 21 years who may be vulnerable due to being looked after, accommodated or fostered by the local authority and those who have been in custody. If these young people become homeless through no fault of their own, there is a duty on the local authority to find them suitable accommodation.

Under the legislation the local authority has a duty to care for and provide accommodation for someone who is unintentionally homeless. If the person is not in priority need or intentionally homeless¹⁵, the authority is under a duty to provide advice, assistance and to carry out an assessment of their situation and circumstances to establish if they are homeless or threatened with homelessness. An individual does not have to wait until they are at the point of losing their accommodation, as would be the case if they are leaving custody and have nowhere to go, but can make an application within 28 days of being threatened with homelessness.

When assessing housing need, local authority assessments are based on whether, the young person is:

- Eligible for assistance
- Homeless
- In priority need
- Not intentionally homeless
- Have a local connection (discretionary)

¹⁵ Intentional homelessness means the individual is considered to have been responsible for losing their last settled accommodation by having deliberately done or not done something. A finding of intentional homelessness effectively works to discharge the local authority's responsibility to find an individual alternative accommodation. This means the individual may lose their right to housing assistance or support or be owed a temporary rather than full duty under housing legislation. In this case they might receive advice and information about housing but not accommodation itself. It is discussed further in the report.

In terms of determining homelessness, the legislation states that an individual is statutorily homeless “*if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in*”. A young person can only legally occupy the family home if their parents give them permission to do so and being asked to leave or being thrown out negates that permission. The Code of Guidance (3.4) that accompanies the legislation suggests that in the case of 16 and 17 year olds joint assessments between housing departments and social services are undertaken. This points to the fact that family breakdown is a significant precursor to homelessness suggesting that family mediation at this stage may offer the potential to repair relationships and avoid homelessness. The appropriateness and role of family mediation is discussed in further detail in chapter 2.

In a survey of local authorities in England, Anderson and Thompson (2005) found that 46 percent of authorities said that when a 16 or 17 year presented to them as homeless, they would contact social services, however this contact was most likely to occur if the young person had previous contact with them or there were concerns about violence or abuse. A number of authorities were critical of social services and considered their efforts were concentrated on younger children with a reported lack of clarity regarding the working arrangements between agencies for this age group (and the findings of this study, discussed later, support this). Additionally, most local authorities did not use multi agency panels to make assessments for 16 and 17 year olds, but this increased when it came to putting together packages of support.

One priority need group identified by the legislation is those vulnerable as a result of serving a custodial sentence. During an assessment for homelessness, legislation requires that vulnerability should be assessed, and this may relate to a single or combination of factors placing the individual at risk. In Wales it is not necessary to prove vulnerability (Homelessness Person's (Priority Need) (Wales) Order 2001).

Working within the Legislative Framework

The agency that is required to provide services to a young person will depend on their age, previous care history and their status in terms of priority need. A young person under 16 years of age should fall within the provisions of the Children Act 1989, whereas 16 and 17 year olds who are homeless will fall within the Homelessness Act. Definitions of homelessness under housing legislation are different to the “in need” and welfare obligations under the Children Act 1989 and this can mean a significant difference in the nature of support (physical and financial) an individual receives in the long and short term, the length of time they receive that assistance for and by which agency. There is some evidence to suggest that social services can be reluctant to accept responsibility because of the possible long-term obligations and local authority housing departments view young people as potentially problematic. The experience of YOTs and young people in this context is more fully examined in chapter 4.

Initiatives To Improve Provision

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to develop a strategy to tackle homelessness in their area. Additionally schedule 2 paragraph 1(1) of the Children Act 1989, states that local authorities should take reasonable steps to identify the extent to which there are children in need in their area and to publish information about the services they provide; clearly there needs to be an interface between both of these planning mechanisms. The Supporting People programme provides the means by which services can be developed in local areas.

Local Authority Housing Strategies

As mentioned above, the Homelessness Act 2002 places an obligation on local authorities to carry out a homelessness review and to develop a homelessness strategy. The review should identify the level of homelessness by need group, project future requirements, identify the services and resources available and needed to meet requirements. The aim of the strategy should be to develop sufficient suitable accommodation and support and to develop preventative services. It should cover a five-year period and be a published document. Relevant partners should be included in the process.

Supporting People

In April 2003 the Supporting People Programme was introduced to draw together separate funding sources to provide housing related support services. Named client groups included:

- those who have been homeless or rough sleepers
- ex-offenders and those at risk of offending and imprisonment
- young people at risk
- homeless families with support needs

The aim of Supporting People is to help individuals successfully live independently and to maintain tenancies. Grants are available to deliver short (up to two years) and long-term (continuous) services for identified client groups. The individuals targeted for these services are those that have traditionally not held any priority for social services or health agencies (JRF 2003). The Supporting People initiative is intended to be complimentary to and run in tandem with the local authority homeless strategy and is promoted as part of the homelessness prevention agenda.

Housing, social services, health and probation services are all able to commission services. YOTs are not named as one of the commissioners, in all probability because the local authority is seen as the lead agency in respect of young people. In addition the Probation Accommodation Grant system, which was used to give offenders under statutory supervision access to supported housing, was pooled into the Supporting People funds thereby giving it legitimacy as a stakeholder.

Housing Policy

In addition to local authority housing strategies and the Supporting People programmes, which operate at a local level, there are also the wider policy considerations that operate at a national level, with some differences between England and Wales, because of the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government. These are briefly described as follows:

England

The central government responsibility for tackling homelessness lies with the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister). In March 2002 the ODPM published 'More than a Roof', which set out its strategy for dealing with homelessness and a separate Homelessness Directorate was set up in the same year, to:

- Promote homelessness prevention
- Reduce the inappropriate use of B&B accommodation
- Reduce the number of people sleeping rough
- Promote more effective cross agency working across departments to tackle homelessness
- Develop the Supporting People Programme

Within this programme were two key targets:

- To ensure that by March 2004 no homeless family will be in B&B accommodation, except in an emergency for longer than six weeks
- To sustain levels of rough sleeping that are below the levels recorded in July 1998 and to continue to sustain and improve upon this.

With regard to these targets the National Audit Office (2005) reports that the former was met by March 2004. The Audit office also comments that the targets applicable to families are also relevant to other homeless people using this accommodation. The experiences of young people involved in the criminal justice system and B&B accommodation are discussed further on in this report. The National Audit Office also reports that targets in respect of rough sleeping have been met nationally, but that the number of rough sleepers in London is still disproportionately high.

In March 2005 the ODPM introduced a new strategy entitled 'Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives'. This has a number of the features of its previous strategy, including encouraging homelessness prevention, providing support for vulnerable people, tackling the causes and symptoms of homelessness and helping people to move away from rough sleeping (ODPM, June 2005). However it has the added objective of providing more settled homes; the ways in which this is intended to be achieved is through:

- Building 200,000 new homes for ownership targeted at young couples and families and linked to key workers and first time buyers, in the south east of England
- Encouraging local authorities to make better use of rent deposits and guarantees and rent in advance to promote better access to the private rented sector
- Developing initiatives to provide more settled housing solutions for families living in temporary accommodation
- Piloting a grant scheme in a number of London Boroughs to assist tenants to procure temporary accommodation
- Increase the number of new social rented homes, to assist those in temporary accommodation to move on.

None of the policy initiatives specifically focused on improving access to accommodation for 16 and 17 year olds.

Wales

In Wales, the WAG and more specifically the Housing Strategy and Services Unit has responsibility for homelessness policy and strategy and for the Supporting People Programme. The National Homeless Strategy for Wales (2006 to 2008) sets out the Government's priorities. In terms of children and young people, the strategy expects:

- Young People's Partnerships¹⁶ will audit young people's needs in their area by 2007/08 and work closely with Local Authority housing services to identify and plan for the needs of homeless young people.
- Education services will raise awareness about homelessness prevention and advocates for local authorities to establish family mediation schemes to prevent youth homelessness.
- The use of B&B accommodation to be reduced and legislation is being introduced to this effect.
- Local authorities to monitor the standard of what is available and to deliver improvements in temporary accommodation.

In addition it is seeking to establish a consultation mechanism to include young people in the development of the National Homelessness Strategy. The Strategy acknowledges that homelessness in rural areas can be a particular problem, and is a specific issue in parts of Wales because of the dispersal of population and remoteness from services.

¹⁶ The mechanism through which Extending Entitlement is delivered in Wales. One of the ten entitlements states that advice on health, housing benefits and other issues should be provided to young people in accessible and welcoming settings.

The Strategy identifies the importance of the link between re-offending and homelessness. The All Wales Youth Offending Strategy has a number of goals for preventing homelessness amongst young people who offend.

The approach in Wales has been different to that of England in that the National Homeless Strategy for Wales has some important goals in respect of young people, notably in terms of the expectations being placed on Young People's Partnerships, which aim to improve the quality of services available to young people to improve outcomes for those aged 11 to 25 years living in Wales. Additionally the WAG's aims in terms of reducing the use of bed and breakfast accommodation are specifically focused at 16 and 17 year olds as well as families with dependent children.

National Trend Data

The final part of this chapter examines the national trend data available in respect of young people and homelessness.

The Office for National Statistics reports that the population of England and Wales at mid 2004 was 53 million, 13 million of which comprised young people under the age of 19 years. Most children and young people live in a married couple family (66 percent)¹⁷. 25 percent of dependent children lived in a lone-parent family in 2004.

In 2003/04, one in six adults aged 16 and over lived alone in Great Britain. Data for 2002/01 indicates that 139,000 children were living with adults or relatives other than their parents, in households that did not contain their parents. Trends indicate that young men are more likely than young women to remain at home with their parents into their twenties.

Government Data

Statistics on homelessness and those in housing need are collected by the Department for Communities and Local Government (formerly ODPM) in England and the WAG in Wales. Information from the ODPM (March 2006) indicated that in 2005 there were 8,970 young people that had been accepted by local authorities in England as being in priority need. These figures relate to 16 and 17 year olds who are in priority need and 18 to 20 year old care leavers. This compared to 3,170 in 1997, indicating a significant increase in the number of young people; statistically this age group now represents eight percent of homelessness acceptances as opposed to seven percent in 1997¹⁸. The last full year figures available for Wales are for 2003, and indicate that of 8,512 households eligible for housing assistance 916 (11 percent) related to young people aged 16 and 17

¹⁷ These are defined as those aged under 16, or aged 16-18 years in full-time education and who have never married.

¹⁸ In 1997 priority need households were defined as those with dependent children or households with persons over the age of 65 years.

years. Pleace and Fitzpatrick (2004) estimated¹⁹ from local authority returns to the Welsh Assembly that there were 1,119 homeless 16 and 17 year olds in 2003, of which 68 percent (757) were female and 32 percent (362) were male).

Scale of Homelessness

The data above only represents part of the picture, as it does not include those young people that made applications to local authorities and were unsuccessful. Additionally the statistics that are available rely on young people making a housing application to the local authority and evidence from a range of services has indicated that they may not know who to approach in the first instance (Shelter, 2005) or make their own arrangements such as living with friends or extended family as opposed to presenting themselves as being in need.

Information from the local authority therefore only provides part of the picture in relation to the potential level of youth homelessness. Centrepoint (2004) commissioned research to look at the scale, trends and causes of youth homelessness in England and Wales. The research concluded that a comprehensive approximation of the level of youth (those aged 16 to 24 years) homelessness (defined from housing legislation²⁰) was difficult to achieve and could only be based on estimates.

Their estimates, which they indicate are broad indicators of homelessness, are based on available information from local authorities, those re-housed from registered social landlords into supported accommodation and those who sleep rough. Comparisons have also been made with data available from Scotland and Wales, to help in the identification of trends. On this basis they estimated that between a minimum of 36,000²¹ and a maximum of 52,000²² young people have been “found to be homeless” by local authorities in England in 2003 and that 13 percent may have had a recent experience of sleeping rough. They also indicate that young women appear to outnumber young men in local authority estimates, particularly amongst 16 and 17 year olds living alone. There are no comparable estimates for Wales.

Voluntary Organisations

Voluntary organisations that work with young people do not appear to publish collated data from their projects that might give an indication of trends although they may feed into other databases. Additionally, the voluntary sector may use different definitions to that of the local authority, which also makes estimating homelessness problematic (Smith, 2004). For example Centrepoint’s annual review in 2004 indicates they worked with over 1,400 young people, but do not give any further information on their status prior to referral.

¹⁹ They took an estimate from the last quarter and rounded for the year hence the discrepancy in the figures

²⁰ If they do not have, or are imminently going to lose, accommodation they could reasonably be expected to occupy.

²¹ Estimated to be 26 percent of households found homeless in 2003.

²² Estimated to be 52 percent of households found homeless in 2003.

Nacro (2005) identified that it works with around 3,000 people a year in flats and hostels across England and Wales, and similarly does not provide further information that might inform the general picture about homelessness. Additionally not all services are focused specifically on young people.

However, the Foyer Federation (2001) state that between 150,000 and 250,000 young people aged between 16 and 25 years of age are estimated to be without a settled address in the UK, but do not state from where their information is drawn. Crisis (2003) estimate that there may be in the region of 450,000 single homeless aged under 25 years living in concealed households²³ and these could be considered homeless at any given time.

The housing provider survey undertaken as part of this study (see chapter 5) identifies the legislative criteria as likely to be a significant factor, given that to be eligible for a placement in a hostel or supported accommodation, there has to be evidence of housing need. The degree to which homelessness prior to placement is monitored is dependent on the level of recording undertaken by individual projects and does not appear to be collated either on an agency or national basis.

Other measures

There are a number of other measures that may indicate homelessness, notably rough sleeping. The then ODPM²⁴ reported that in June 1998, there were an estimated 1,850 people sleeping rough on any one night in England, by 2001 this had reduced to 550 people. The SEU identified that few rough sleepers are under 18 years of age and that it is difficult to establish reliable figures because, by their very nature, they are a transient population.

Information in respect of rough sleepers in London is held in CHAIN²⁵, which is a database containing details of individuals, the services they access and outcomes from agencies who work with rough sleepers in London. Pleace and Fitzpatrick (2004) indicate that in 2002 contact with 2,761 people was recorded on CHAIN, 13 percent (n=382) of which were young people aged less than 24 years of age. As a result they estimate that across England on an annual basis there are between 4,700 and 6,700 young people found to be homeless who have slept rough in the three months prior to presenting as homeless.

CORE is a system that records lettings by registered social landlords in England, which includes various forms of social housing, including hostels and supported accommodation. Pleace and Fitzpatrick (2004) identified that in 2002/03 there were 13,800 “new lets” to young people of which 3,607 were 16 year olds (26 percent) and 7,366 17 year olds (53 percent). These include both homeless young people and those in priority need. The research observes that this is an indicator that the number of young

²³ Defined as either sharing overcrowded accommodation, which they do not own or rent and are not in a relationship (spouse, partner or dependent child of the owner/renter) or in a household that is not overcrowded, but where the head of the household considers the arrangement to be unsatisfactory.

²⁴ www.communities.gov.uk

²⁵ www.broadwaylondon.org

people who may not have contact with local authority housing departments is likely to be significant.

Looked After Children

Looked after children have a high representation in homelessness statistics and contact with homelessness services (Centrepoin 2002)²⁶ and as a result have been specifically considered. In England at 31 March 2004 there was 61,100 looked after children²⁷ which when equated to the general population represents 55 out of every 100,000 children. Overall there has been a 24 percent rise in the actual number of looked after children since 1993/94. The main reason for being in care was neglect or abuse (62 percent) followed by family dysfunction (10 percent).

Fifty-five percent of looked after children are boys and 80 percent are white. 39,400 children were looked after on care orders – of these 18,900 were under voluntary arrangements²⁸. 68 percent of looked after children were in foster care, 13 percent in children's homes or hostels and 10 percent with their parents. 13 percent of young people had experienced more than three placements in the year.

In 2003/04, 6,700 young people left care at age 16 years or over and 56 percent were male. The proportion of care leavers aged 16 and 17 years has fallen from 57 percent in 1999/2000 to 43 percent in 2003/04, indicating that the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 may mean that some young people of this age group are being looked after for longer.

Outcome indicators for looked after children in the 12 months to 30 September 2004, indicated that nine percent of looked after children, who have reached the age of criminal responsibility, have received a Reprimand, Final Warning or conviction in the preceding 12 months. This compares to three percent of the general population.

In Wales, 4,591 young people were looked after at 31 March 2004 (National Assembly Wales, February 2005). This was 77 more than the previous year. As with England the main reason for being in care related to abuse or neglect (47 percent). The majority who left care returned to their families (57 percent).

In conclusion, the review of national trend data has identified that the majority of literature relating to homeless young people tends to focus on the risk factors and not the numbers in need; on the whole there is a paucity of information in this respect, which makes identifying the exact picture across England and Wales difficult.

²⁶ Information on looked after children is available from the DfES in England (March 2005).

²⁷ Excluding those accommodated under an agreed series of short term placements.

²⁸ Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

Evidence from statistics collected by local authorities suggests that there is an increasing trend in homelessness for those aged 16 and 17 years and a significant number living in temporary accommodation as a result. Information regarding looked after children suggests that they too are an increasing population.

The difficulty is in building an accurate picture because local authorities' statistics relate to those young people who apply to them as homeless. This means there may be large number of young people that fall within the varying definitions of homelessness, that do not approach local authorities, as they may choose to stay with friends or relatives. These represent a hidden homeless population or as Crisis observe those living in concealed households. Furthermore, agencies working in the field of homelessness cannot or do not collect or collate information on those they work with in a centralised or consistent way. These factors all contribute to the fact that different agencies are also reporting wide ranging statistics in this respect.

Housing and Accommodation Issues and YOTs

This section examines the role and function of the YOT in relation to housing and accommodation issues. This mainly is set within the context of the target it is required to achieve identified by the YJB.

The information for the chapter has been drawn largely from a review of 128 youth justice plans, 83 percent of those that would have been produced for 2004/5, so is considered broadly representative of YOTs as a whole. The section starts with an analysis of the role of the accommodation officer in the team and goes onto highlight key findings from the evaluation of youth justice plans. It concludes with reference to other relevant strategies.

Performance Indicator

The YJB has identified 15 key performance indicators against which YOTs are required to report on their progress in quarterly and annual returns. One of these measures relates to accommodation:

- All YOTs are required to have an accommodation officer
- All young people subject to a community intervention or on release from the secure estate must have satisfactory accommodation to go to

The following comments are a review of YOTs' progress against this indicator.

All YOTs are required to have an accommodation officer

In 2001 it became a requirement of core funding from the YJB that an accommodation officer be appointed (Advice Note 5 Feb 2001). The guidance suggested this did not have to be a full time post, but could be the identified responsibility of an existing YOT team member, provided they were given sufficient time to carry out the function. The necessity

to have a nominated person in this post has been incorporated into the YJB's performance measure for accommodation (YJB Youth Justice Plan Guidance).

The YJB indicated the primary role of the accommodation officer was to identify any gaps in housing provision and provide local planning forums with relevant information about the needs of young people. The YJB also suggested YOTs should aim to influence local housing strategies, develop directories of provision and be included in strategic partnerships for children leaving care (Advice Note 5).

In terms of what the role and function of the accommodation officer comprised, Hucklesby and Goodwin (2001) identified that dealing with accommodation issues as they arose in relation to individual young people and developing links with housing providers were the primary activities. Nacro Cymru (2005) identified that, in reality, the accommodation officer function can be split between a number of individuals despite there being a nominated officer.

As has previously been mentioned part of this study involved a review of Youth Justice Plans for 2004/5. These revealed that, almost without exception, YOTs had accommodation officers in place, although a small number of areas acknowledged the post was currently vacant. The majority of plans were, however, insufficiently detailed to allow any concrete analysis of how this function was discharged or the role the accommodation officer was expected to play. Just over 40 percent of plans, for instance, did not specify whether the accommodation officer was a dedicated post or the role was simply appended to a member of staff's other duties. Similarly, where it was clear that the YOT had a dedicated accommodation officer – as indicated in 38 percent of plans – it was not always possible to discern whether the post was full time.

This lack of clarity as to how the requirement to have a named accommodation officer was fulfilled was mirrored by a lack of detail in relation to what they were intended to do. Significantly, the accommodation officer was frequently not named as the lead officer against many of the accommodation-related action points within the plans. Where there were references to the functions of the post, these suggested a wide range of approaches, perhaps reflecting differences in the way that the post was filled or the fact that, as Nacro Cymru identified, in practice the responsibility is a split function.

The plans indicated some accommodation officers had a strategic brief, representing the YOT in a range of local forums, such as Supporting People or those relating to the Local Authority's homelessness strategy; others were expected to develop links with local housing providers, to extend the range of provision available to young people who offend. More frequently, the role appeared to be focused at the operational level, locating individual placements as the need arose, and supporting young people in placements. At the same time, there was some expectation that accommodation officers should develop a level of expertise in housing legislation and a good knowledge of locally available resources, which could be cascaded to other practitioners within the team. It was,

however, also identified that the majority of accommodation officers were appointed to the role without previous knowledge and experience of housing and accommodation issues and it was only a minority that had received training in this respect once appointed.

This suggests that the role and function of the accommodation officer needs further clarity and an indication of priority in terms of its role and function. It also suggests that all those appointed as an accommodation officer should receive specialist training in housing and accommodation matters, so that they are sufficiently equipped to undertake the role.

All young people subject to a community intervention or on release from the secure estate must have satisfactory accommodation to go to

The review of youth justice plans indicated that performance against target during 2004/5 was relatively high with an average of 94 percent of young people assessed as being in suitable accommodation:

Table 1.1: YOT performance against accommodation performance indicator by region		
	Percentage of young people assessed to be in suitable accommodation	
Region	2003	2004/2005
East Midlands	93.9	96.1
Eastern	92.4	94.6
London	89.8	92.6
North East	94.2	96.7
North West	92.3	96.2
South East	90.1	93.4
South West	87.5	94.3
Wales	91	92
West Midlands	93.4	95.3
Yorkshire	93.4	93.3
Total England and Wales	91.8	94.4

Table 1.2: Sample YOT performance against accommodation performance indicator		
	Percentage of young people assessed to be in suitable accommodation	
Region	2003	2004/2005
A	98	98
B	94	95
C	93.5	97.5
D	75	90.8
E	79	88
F	100	100
G	87	95.8
H	89	91.8
I	98.7	99
J	86	86
Sample average:	90	94.2

Moreover, there was a significant overall increase in the proportion of young people assessed as being in suitable accommodation between 2003 and 2004/05.

These figures do not imply, however, that the provision of suitable accommodation is not a problematic issue. Almost three quarters of YOTs indicated that the target presented significant challenges and noted shortages of accommodation for children and young people who offend in their area, relative to the level of need. In addition there continue to be a number of issues concerning young offenders and accommodation issues, including unmet need and unsuitable accommodation.

In the plans YOTs acknowledged that while there might be a relatively small number of young people at any one time who were not in suitable accommodation, the absence of somewhere appropriate to live for that group had a disproportionate impact, making it difficult for them to engage in any form of supervisory process, and exacerbating significantly the risk of further offending. At the same time, although the large majority of young people were suitably accommodated, this was primarily to do with the fact that their family and home circumstances were not considered sufficiently problematic to lead to a risk of homelessness. As a consequence, for the minority of young people who had serious housing difficulties, finding somewhere suitable for them to live was significantly more problematic than the performance figures suggested. In particular, many plans cited the continued use of bed and breakfast accommodation, particularly for young people aged 16 to 17 years of age, as an unavoidable, but less than satisfactory, necessity.

A number of plans considered the performance measure might understate the level of need because the assessment of whether particular accommodation is appropriate is largely subjective. The YJB counting rules define '*suitable accommodation*' in

accordance with the Children (Leaving Care) (England) Regulations 2001. On this basis, the assessment of suitability should take into account:

- Whether the accommodation is suitable for the child in the light of his or her needs;
- The child's wishes and his or her education, training or employment needs;
- The character of the landlord or other provider.

The definition does not determine suitability for particular accommodation types but allows for a professional assessment by the individual practitioner. In some areas, there were plans to develop a more detailed definition of suitability to ensure greater consistency of recording at the local level. It was acknowledged that this might result in a reporting of lower performance against the target. This study has identified that young people's views are not usually taken into account. We have also shown that they interpret suitability differently – placing safety and cleanliness more highly than practitioners - and placing less emphasis on particular forms of accommodation. We would suggest therefore that their views are placed centrally to any new or developing definitions.

The YJB performance measure is a snapshot at a particular point in time and does not ask YOTs to specifically identify those in housing need or to relate the information to outcomes. The definition of suitable accommodation taken from the Children (Leaving Care) Regulations, relates to individual needs (although age and maturity are not mentioned) and not to suitable and unsuitable forms of accommodation. As discussed more fully later on in the report *Asset* data may provide an opportunity for gaining a more complete and accurate picture of probable housing need within the YOT.

The purpose of the analysis of youth justice plans was to identify emerging issues, both within the sample areas and across the whole of England and Wales, which might indicate common problems or potential solutions to provide a context for the detailed findings of the current study. There were however limitations to this process as a consequence of the prescribed standardised format of the plans. The content of plans tended to be pitched at a relatively high level of generality, inevitably generating a high degree of overlap and repetition between many of the YOT areas. For example, the following action points drawn from separate plans were not atypical in their lack of specificity:

- 'Accommodation officer to draw up protocols with all housing providers'
- 'Possible allocation of funds from Supporting People to provide supported lodgings if required'.

At the same time, some action points were understandably so localised that their relevance for a broader understanding of the issues surrounding accommodation for children and young people who offend was limited. However, the analysis when

combined with information from other research sources has identified a number of areas of consensus:

- There is a serious lack of suitable and supported accommodation for young people.
- The problems are most acute for 16 and 17 year olds.
- Young people may be remanded in custody due to a lack of suitable accommodation.
- There is an over reliance on bed and breakfast accommodation.

As a result of the difficulties in accessing suitable accommodation some YOTs have developed their own dedicated accommodation provision, to ensure access to placements for a given number of young people where required. A minority of the youth justice plans reviewed made reference to such schemes, which were largely of two types:

- Accommodation controlled and managed directly through the YOT, most commonly in the form of remand fostering, with a smaller number of supported lodging schemes; and
- Access to placements in accommodation controlled by another provider, which were ring fenced to young people referred by the youth offending team.

It was not always apparent from the plans whether accommodation was ‘dedicated’²⁹ in the manner just described. Some, for instance, referred to the potential to access remand fostering provision through Children’s Services without making it plain whether this involved ring fencing of a certain number of places to the YOT. Similarly, it was not clear, in all cases, whether service level agreements guaranteed a particular level of provision to the YOT or whether placement was contingent on there being vacancies within the scheme.

Given these qualifications, just over a third of YOTs appeared to have access to some form of dedicated accommodation provision. While the existence of such schemes was regarded as being a necessary condition of meeting the accommodation performance targets, in many cases it was not regarded as sufficient. Most YOTs who had access to dedicated placements continued to report a shortfall of accommodation for young people within their areas against need.

A number of YOTs indicated they were in the process of developing schemes that would give them access to dedicated provision. However, the cost of developing such provision

²⁹ ‘Dedicated’ in this sense, is intended to mean providing appropriate priority access to YOTs and for young offenders. This does not necessarily indicate that the provision should be ‘exclusive’ – in that the provider may also house other groups in need.

was highlighted in a number of plans as a significant obstacle and the viability of such schemes was also cited as a problem by some of the smaller YOTs, where absolute numbers are relatively few.

Recent Developments

The YJB has published a number of strategies that relate specifically to accommodation issues, for example Sustainable Accommodation (to be published shortly) and Youth Resettlement: A framework for action, which highlights that meeting accommodation needs as a key feature of successful resettlement.

The Board is advocating that YOTs develop their own local accommodation strategy to help prevent and reduce the likelihood of homelessness, to improve access to existing housing provision and to develop cohesive working arrangements with other agencies and housing providers. It is of note that the YOT is required to be a broker and advocate for services and not a direct provider of accommodation for young people.

One of the issues that has been identified is that YOTs should consider monitoring local targets in respect of the following, on a monthly basis as part of this strategic development:

- The number of people remanded to custody because they lack suitable accommodation
- Young people leaving custody without accommodation to go to
- Young people provided with accommodation because they are statutorily homeless
- Young people aged 16 and 17 years receiving and not receiving an “in need” or housing assessment
- The number of young people accessing supported housing
- The number of young people accessing independent tenancies
- The number of homelessness cases that have been prevented by early intervention
- The number of young people remaining in unsuitable accommodation each month.

The issue of identifying and capturing the number of young people in accommodation need is an issue that is commented on in this study. There is no prescribed format for the YOT accommodation strategy and further information is available on www.yjb.gov.uk.

Other Relevant Issues

The work of the YOT in relation to housing and accommodation matters also has relevance in respect of the All Wales Youth Offending strategy and its relationship with the National Offender Management Service.

All Wales Youth Offending Strategy

The WAG does not have devolved responsibility for criminal justice matters, but does have responsibility for a number of services that YOTs access for young people, for example housing and accommodation. The Strategy (WAG 2004) incorporates the aims of the WAG and YJB and sets out a series of shared objectives that are aimed to prevent offending and consider the needs and entitlements of young people. These are also aimed at promoting joint working at local level. With regard to housing, the objectives³⁰ are to:

- Evaluate the extent to which the needs of young offenders have been addressed within the local homelessness strategies;
- Assess the extent to which the needs of young people are addressed in the Supporting People Operational Plans;
- Advise the YJB and YOTs on the setting of appropriate targets for all young offenders released from custody into arranged and suitable accommodation;
- Ensure through the YJB and local authorities that all YOTs are working to identify the housing needs of young offenders in their areas and to ensure that this informs the contribution and involvement with local homelessness and Supporting People planning processes.

Nacro Cymru has undertaken a mapping exercise in respect of resettlement issues and reported on accommodation issues within the context of YOTs and specifically in relation to Homelessness Strategies and Supporting People Operational Plans. The placement of young people into suitable accommodation is being monitored through the YJB's key performance indicator.

National Offender Management Service

The National Offender Management Service published the 'Reducing Re-Offending National Action Plan', which sets out a number of actions for delivery at local, regional and national level. It covers a number of 'rehabilitation pathways', one of which relates to accommodation. Whilst the actions required mainly relate to adult offenders, there is recognition that there also needs to be a focus on the juvenile aspects. This is relevant, for example in terms of case transfer arrangements between the YOT and Probation Service. *Joining together in Wales*, sets out the sets out how the strategy is intended to be delivered in Wales and focuses on the issues relating to those aged 16 to 18 years of age.

³⁰ Progress against these aims is reviewed annually.

Chapter 2 – Home, the family and other risk factors

This chapter will consider the life experiences of the young people included and interviewed in our sample leading up to experiencing accommodation difficulties and, in some cases, leaving home. This will incorporate numerous risk factors, such as family circumstances, relationships and childhood experiences, community and neighbourhood influences, as well as young peoples' behaviour that may be directly or indirectly associated with leaving (or having to leave) accommodation.

The following chapter will explore the experiences of young offenders once they have left the family home, either because they were taken into care, housed by the local authority, taken in by relatives, stayed with friends after leaving the family home or moved into another form of temporary accommodation.

Family Circumstances, Relationships and Childhood

In interview³¹, young people were asked to complete a calendar showing places they had lived in the past 12 months. Of the 152 young people who completed a calendar, 105 had lived in the parental home on one or more occasions during the past 12 months and 41 were living there at the point of interview.

Relationships with mothers were discussed more than with fathers, even when the father (or step-father) also lived with them. According to young people and practitioners, mothers appeared to be more involved in decisions about whether the young person continued to live in the family home. That is, the mother might tell the young person to leave, come to a mutual agreement with the young person that they should leave, or be unable to care for the young person – in which case social services or another relative might be called upon. Thus the mother was the most probable person to make the decision about whether a young person stayed within or left the family home.

Some young people in the sample discussed positive aspects of their relationships with their mothers, saying that they loved them and would turn to them for help or were rebuilding relationships with them following periods away from the family home (in custody, care or having being thrown out). However, arguing with their mothers while they were living at home about rules, behaviour and offending was also an important factor in their description of family life and this was supported by YOT practitioners.³² The scale or nature of difficulties would appear to be different from those one might

³¹ The data informing this chapter include *Asset* data on the entire sample (n= 257), structured (152) and semi-structured interviews (54), calendars (152) and interviews with YOT practitioners from a number of sites (64).

³² Seven young people who spoke about arguing with their mothers also described some positive aspects of their relationships.

expect to see in most family relationships. Thus, for some, arguments with mothers went on for long periods of time and a small number felt antagonised by their mothers:

I: And why do you say that it was bad with your mum?

R: Because we was ripping each other's throats out every day for four years.

...

R: ...sometimes she makes me feel bad. She just makes me feel angry.

I: Because of...?

R: Anything...Any little thing...She's a wind-up merchant.

In addition, there was evidence about negative relationships with mothers which included their mothers' problematic use of alcohol, prescribed or illicit drugs.³³ *Asset* data showed that for 22 percent and 23 percent of the overall sample, a family member was involved in alcohol abuse and drug abuse respectively³⁴:

R: ...I didn't want to go back to my mum's...

I: Why not?

R: Dunno... 'cos...she's just an alkie...

I: You feel uncomfortable when you're at home?

R: Sometimes, yeah, when she drinks.

For some of the sample their negative experiences had led to a complete breakdown of their relationship with their mother and this included two young people who no longer wanted contact with their mothers, two who had been involved in physical fights with their mothers³⁵, one who said she hated her mother and two for whom there was a sense of being 'rejected' by mothers after being thrown out.³⁶ However, a small number of the sample strove to remain in contact or rebuild family relationships even where there had been evidence of considerable difficulties, including abuse.

Tension, conflict or other problems within the family are mentioned in a number of other studies on young people who have left home and are either street homeless or housed in temporary accommodation. The 'Taking Risks' study in 1999 (Breugal and Smith) found that among 200 street homeless young people (aged 16 to 19 years³⁷) and a further 154 living in hostels, family factors were most associated with becoming homeless, particularly the relationship with the mother – followed by moving house more than

³³ One of these young people said his mother hit him when she had been drinking alcohol and another (who was interviewed in custody) said he had lived in crack houses in the past because of his mother's substance use.

³⁴ *Asset* data for the 'family member involved in alcohol abuse' field were missing for 29 percent. *Asset* data for the 'family member involved in drug abuse' field were missing for 26 percent.

³⁵ A YOT practitioner said one other young person had been in a physical fight with his mother.

³⁶ Another young person said he did not think his step-mother liked him and another one had been 'abandoned' by her mother.

³⁷ The age range in the present study was 13 to 18 years and therefore not directly comparable to samples in other research studies.

twice, living in foster care, living with a step parent or relative. Centrepoint (2004) found that 80 percent of young people (16 to 25 year olds) they had contact with in 2004 (n=1,450) had left home because of family breakdown or conflict.

Relationships with fathers in the family home were significantly less likely to be talked about by young people and did not appear to occupy as important a position in the lives of the young people we interviewed. However where they did, 14 young people said they had positive relationships with their fathers and three of these said this was helpful and a steadying influence in their lives.

The young offenders with housing difficulties interviewed in this study tended not to discuss arguments with their fathers as much as they did with their mothers, although some discussed poor relationships with fathers, step-fathers or mothers' partners. On occasions the poor relationship was related to the father's problematic use of alcohol which was discussed in 11 interviews³⁸. Additionally, one young person had to flee from the family home because she was being hit by her father (domestic violence and abuse are discussed in more detail below).

Fathers could also be absent from the young person's life and reasons for this included them no longer living with mothers or working away from home and, in a couple of cases, paternity was a contentious issue between the young people and their fathers. Nine young people said they had little or no contact with their fathers.

Relationships with siblings could be both positive and negative as one might expect and this included feeling responsible for siblings, wanting to protect them, finding their special needs highly stressful or disapproving of their lifestyle choices. Family size and over-crowding could also be problematic and this could lead to family break-up, for example one young person had 12 half-siblings which meant the family could not stay together.³⁹ However, when asked if they had ever lived with someone they really liked or loved, ten young people mentioned their brothers and sisters.⁴⁰

Others talked about arguing or not getting on with siblings and this would typically relate to sharing space and jealousies:

Me and my brother, we always used to fight and, like when we used to fight that used to smash up the house, like when we were fighting.

Few young people talked in detail about family discord and breakdown, but of those that did some talked about parental arguments, divorce and separation, which one young person considered had '*messed me up*'. Step-parents (or partners) generated more

³⁸ This included young people and practitioners interviews.

³⁹ This young person also did not think his step-mother liked him and the latter had convinced his father to place some of the children in care. Farrington and Painter (2004) found that large family size is predictive of offending, particularly for girls.

⁴⁰ YOT practitioners said that five young people had good relationships with their families.

discussion however and relationships were mostly described in a negative way. *Asset* data for the overall sample showed that seven percent had mostly lived with a step-parent over the past six months.⁴¹ Four interviewees talked about arguing with their step-fathers or mother's partners and one said he left home because of this:

I: How did you become homeless on those occasions?

R: Just argued with my mum. Just fighting with her boyfriends and shit.

Other research has suggested that parents introducing new partners or step-parents can lead to disputes (Randall and Brown, 2001) and living with a step-parent increased the likelihood of leaving home (Breugal and Smith, 1999). Furthermore, Smith and McVie (2003) suggest that young people living with a mother and step-father (or single father) have more elevated offending levels than those living with a single mother.

Additionally, the interviews with young offenders and YOT practitioners showed a high level of instability in the young peoples' lives preceding them leaving the family home. This would manifest in various ways, such as experiencing child abuse, witnessing domestic violence between parents, running away, periods spent 'in care' and bereavement.

Asset data showed that 40 percent of the overall sample in this study had been abused⁴² and this included physical and sexual abuse perpetrated by a parent, foster carers or a family member:

I: ...if she's drinking vodka she goes all violent. It could be mad.

R: Has she ever been violent to you?

I: Yes. Sometimes.

The prevalence of abuse is high, although a study of Persistent Young Offenders found levels of abuse at 58 percent⁴³ (Arnull et al, 2005). It is also congruent with a Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) study (1997), which suggested that the majority of young people who had come from disrupted homes had experienced abuse – the most common type being physical⁴⁴. We did not seek to discuss in detail with young people in this study, their experiences of abuse, however, it was raised by some interviewees and in particular by two young people who were hit by a foster carer and cousin. They were evidently upset by their experiences – particularly as they felt they were not believed when they

⁴¹ This usually meant that young people were living with a birth parent plus step-parent and there is the likelihood that this is an under-representation due to missing data on *Assets*.

⁴² Data were missing for 25 percent of the *Asset* sample.

⁴³ 22 percent in this study were not abused and 20 percent of the data was missing.

⁴⁴ Furthermore, Smith and McVie (2003) found that young people who had been victimised were more likely to offend.

reported the incidents – and both had run away. The young person who was hit by his (adult) cousin was also deprived of food by her:

I: Where did you run away from?

R: My cousin's.

I: And she was the one being violent to you?

R: Yeah...

I: ...I like my social workers, but I've never liked social services. I told them plenty of times what [cousin] was doing and they never believed me... Like when she slaps me... when she proper hits me... they started questioning me about it. I started telling them and they... go and put me in front of [cousin]. Then [cousin] just started to give me that look, and then... I dunno... I just said 'no I'm lying' ... They'd be like 'oh well, why are you trying to seek attention?' And every time I ran away ...and social workers just going 'yes, wasting our time'.

Other young people in the sample and YOT practitioners also talked about young people running away and this included four who had done so regularly. There were a range of reasons for running away; some ran away following abuse (as mentioned above), one ran away to escape an uncle who used to hang around the family home and one young person ran away after stealing from his father. Overall, reasons appeared to be associated with family factors. The young people themselves did not provide very much detail about where they went when they ran away other than they would see friends when they did. Two young people said their parents looked for them when they ran away but did not go back home:

But even though I went on the run for a little while about some... in [place name] when I was down there my mum was looking for me all round [different place name] and everything with her stupid little shitty boyfriend. And then she reported me missing but then she still wouldn't have me back. So I'm thinking why were you searching for me then if you wouldn't have me back? I thought fuck you. She didn't want me there.

This finding is supported by previous research which has indicated that young people cite problems or conflict within the family as the most common reason for running away (SEU, 2002; Home Office, 2003). Other reasons include substance use, being in trouble with the police, having a criminal conviction, regular truanting and being excluded from school. In 2002, the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) defined 'running away' as a child or young person spending one night or more away from the family home or care without permission. The SEU estimated that approximately 77,000 young people run away overnight. This is most common amongst 13-15 year olds and young women are more likely to run away than young men. The majority of young people eventually return home, however a significant number under 16 years of age are unable to return because of abuse.

Between 2001 and 2002, 3,000 young people who called the Childline charity had run away from home or been thrown out (Childline, 2002). Again, the antecedents were

family arguments, experiences of violence in the home, physical abuse (37 percent of young men and 63 percent of young women) and pregnancy. The young people had not necessarily planned to run away, but had done so on the spur of the moment and thus were unprepared. As mentioned above, most young people return home but for those who do not, running away can be a step towards street homelessness or independent living.

Within the youth justice system, young people are described as ‘absconding’ as opposed to running away and information about this is collected on *Asset*. Within the *Asset* sample in the present study, 34 percent had ever absconded, stayed away from home or been reported missing (from a residential or foster care placement)^{45, 46}. There were no significant differences between males and females or ethnic groups for absconsion. In a sample of 3,395 young people, Baker et al (2002) found that 13 percent absconded or stayed away from home regularly. Incidences of running away appear therefore to be higher in this sample than the general YOT sample, which may be reflective of the fact that we sampled for young people with accommodation problems. It also probably reflects the high levels of abuse, ‘in care’ experiences and levels of family discord and disruption which have also been discussed and which other studies also show as likely to be risk factors for accommodation problems and young people running away from home.

When scoring Living Arrangements, Family and Personal Relationships and Neighbourhood on *Asset*, YOT practitioners considered a range of factors about the young peoples’ childhoods and family circumstances. Issues such as relationships, tension and arguments, parents’ substance use, domestic violence and abuse have already been discussed above. Scoring also considered information about traumatic experiences that happened some time ago that led to young people moving house or being taken into care. For example, one young person had witnessed a horrific assault on his mother and another had saved his uncle who was bleeding to death from a heroin injecting injury.

Finally, a significant proportion of the sample had experienced bereavement and this appeared to be related to movement or being unsettled. *Asset* data showed that 45 per cent of the overall sample had been bereaved⁴⁷. A 2001 study by Harrison and Harrington estimated that 92 percent of young people in the UK will experience bereavement by the age of 16⁴⁸ and, for four to seven percent this will pertain to a parent. Eight young people discussed bereavement in their interviews and YOT practitioners discussed it with regards to six more young people. This referred to mothers (6), fathers (6), grandparents

⁴⁵ Data on absconsion was missing for 22 percent of the *Asset* sample.

⁴⁶ There are sampling differences in the Baker et al., Nacro Cymru and present studies which could account, in part, for the variance in absconsion levels.

⁴⁷ This could be an under-representation due to missing data on *Assets* for 20 percent of the sample.

⁴⁸ In this study, bereavement referred to all ‘close’ or significant relationships and the 92 percent includes pets.

(3), a brother and a best friend.⁴⁹ Two young people provided some detail about how bereavement had triggered other unsettling experiences and a general sense of loss.

And then I turned seven, my dad died. I lost my mum, my dad, my house, my dog, everything I owned in one day.

On calendars, young people in the sample were asked to rate how happy they were in each accommodation 'type' they had been in; this included the family home. The scale was 'very happy', 'happy', 'OK', 'unhappy' and 'very unhappy'. With regard to the parental home (and where this question was answered), it appeared that young people were more likely to report being very happy or happy in the parental home than in any other type of accommodation. Although this might appear to contradict the general sense that young people in this study had unsettled or unhappy experiences at home, most young people also felt that living with family (or at least being near them) was important – and this is detailed later in the report within the 'Aspirations' section. Further, it would seem that this related both to the young person's own experiences, whether positive or negative, and also reflected social expectations. Thus the young people thought that the family home should be a happy place and one where they were safe and loved – and as noted earlier this was the case even where the young person had been abused:

I: Okay. Have you ever lived with anyone that you really liked or loved?

R: No. Except for my mum and sister.

I: Okay. So you do... You do have quite deep feelings for them?

R: Yeah. You have to love parents and, like, your family.

I: Yeah. But you described it can be quite hard living there.

R: Yeah.

YOT practitioners also considered young people moving around to contribute to their scores for the three aforementioned *Asset* domains. This could manifest in movements from placement to placement, movement into care or even movement into the area. Calendars also showed the frequency of movements made by 151 young offenders (moving from one accommodation to another) in the 12 month period prior to interview. The average number of movements made by the sample in a twelve month period was 2.7 and the range included no movements (n=20) to at least 14 (n=1).

⁴⁹ Three young people had been bereaved twice each (one was orphaned). Two other young people were brothers and spoke about the same father who died.

Fig 2.1 Frequency of ‘movements’ between different accommodation types over the last 12 months according to calendars⁵⁰

Minimum number of movements	Frequency
0 moves	20
At least 1	31
At least 2	28
At least 3	26
At least 4	20
At least 5	11
At least 6	6
At least 7	3
At least 8	1
At least 9	2
At least 10	1
At least 13	1
At least 14	1

These represented the minimum number of moves made by young people in the sample as some could not recall all of the places they had lived in a one year period, or because they moved so frequently between different types of accommodation, for example between different groups of friends and the parental home. Thus recording might indicate one move, but might hide a very itinerant lifestyle moving to whoever had room for the young person that evening. It is anticipated therefore that the calendars are an underestimation of the frequency of movements made within a year. Nonetheless, they are useful indicator of the unsettled accommodation patterns for this sample, which would otherwise be hidden.

Another factor related to instability was whether the young people were (or had been) living with known offenders. Past research by Graham and Bowling (1995) and Arnull et al (2005) has shown that living with offenders is strongly related to young people going on to commit offences themselves. *Asset* data showed that 34 percent of the overall sample had done so⁵¹ and it was mentioned in 12 YOT practitioner and young people interviews. In three cases these offenders were specified as parents and in other cases these were siblings, step-siblings, ex-boyfriends, an aunt, and an unrelated adult.⁵² Two young people spoke about being encouraged into offending by and participating in an offence with a sibling or cousin.

⁵⁰ There were 152 calendars in total but one did not record the number of movements, thus 151 were analysed.

⁵¹ There were missing data on *Assets* for 26 percent of the sample.

⁵² The YOT practitioner for this young person said the unrelated older man was a Schedule 1 offender.

Then I went to live with my auntie, she lived in [place name], with my cousins and stuff... On the way back from school we stopped off in a shop and my cousin turned around and said 'look, go thieve something' and I knew it was bad but... So I went and done it... I nicked it and the police come. The shopkeeper held me there. And the police wanted to take me home. And my auntie found me on my way home with the police and she just said 'that's it, I've given up on you, you're going back to your dad's.

Physical and geographical factors of accommodation

Previous research has highlighted that young people living in disorganised inner city areas, which have a high preponderance of physical deterioration, overcrowded households, high residential mobility and social housing are at higher risk of becoming involved in offending (Farrington, 1996). In the present study, *Asset* showed that 27 percent of the young people identified as having accommodation difficulties lived in a crime hotspot area⁵³. The table below shows that 30 percent lived in council accommodation (on an estate or in council housing).

Fig 2.2 Descriptions of young people's accommodation according to their *Assets* (n=257)

Asset description	Percentage⁵⁴ (n)
Council accommodation (including estate)	30 (77)
Older housing	14.8 (38)
Mixed inner city metropolitan area	11.3 (29)
Rural	5.4 (14)
Modern family housing	3.5 (9)
Residential home	0.8 (2)
Affluent/ suburban	0.8 (2)
B&B	0.4 (1)
Not known	0.4 (1)
Cannot code ⁵⁵	14.8 (38)
Missing data	14.8 (38)

In the study by Baker et al (2002), 52 percent of young people being supervised by YOTs lived on council estates, 29 percent lived in older housing and 24 percent lived in crime 'hotspot' areas. The sampled population in this study is not therefore particularly different from the general YOT population with regard to neighbourhood.

⁵³ Data were missing for 34 percent.

⁵⁴ NB Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

⁵⁵ In these cases, the YOT practitioners have described the neighbourhoods in various different ways. This category does include 12 descriptions of 'high crime' areas.

On *Asset* 'unsuitable' accommodation refers to that which does not meet the young person's needs because it is, for example, overcrowded or lacks basic amenities.⁵⁶ Within the sample, 24 percent were living in unsuitable accommodation.⁵⁷ Criteria for 'deprived' households includes dependence on welfare benefits and entitlement to free school meals and within the sample, 42 percent lived in such accommodation.⁵⁸

In ten cases YOT practitioners described the physical state of the house as good, 'nice' or clean and in a further nine cases the accommodation was deemed 'adequate' or 'basic' but meeting the young peoples' needs.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, interviews with young people and YOT practitioners did provide insight into factors related to the accommodation itself that might contribute to offending or lead to moving out. Five YOT practitioners mentioned young peoples' households being in a poor state of repair:

They had a fire in the living room, the walls are all black, no doorknobs, they have 10, 11, 12 kittens running around with no litter trays. One of the reasons [young person] is quite aggressive is because he's quite embarrassed and wants the house to be tidy... None of the rooms are habitable in that the ceilings and the loft had fallen down.

Others described living in crowded conditions in the family home, which meant for some that they had to move out⁶⁰:

R: And then once I had the baby I moved back with my mum and dad. I was there for six weeks, they chucked me out, me and my sister.

I: Why did they chuck you out at that point?

R: Because me and my sister were arguing. Because I'm the cleanest one out of them and I was sick and tired of the mess in my house from my sister. And I had a new born baby, and my sister was leaving dirty nappies around. And like my niece is... four now, but then she was two. And I had a newborn baby. And it was hard. We were in a three-bedroomed house and there was ten of us living there. So it was hard.

I: So that was your family plus other relatives?

R: Well there was six of us together and another two babies. My sister's baby and mine so that's eight. And then it was my brother's girlfriend living with us, so that's nine. Oh, no nine sorry. And... And it was hard... I know there was a roof over our head, but it's hard living like that. Anyway me and my sister were

⁵⁶ YJB (undated) *Asset*. An assessment framework for young people in the youth justice system. London. YJB.

⁵⁷ Data were missing for 18 percent.

⁵⁸ Data were missing for 20 percent.

⁵⁹ In these cases, there would typically be other factors involved which made the YOT practitioner believe Living Arrangements were a risk factor, for example family relationships.

⁶⁰ One of these young people agreed with his mother to leave the family home because it was too crowded.

constantly arguing. So me and my sister, my son and my niece, they chucked us all out.

Twenty seven percent of the sample lived in a disorganised/ chaotic household, (that is people were coming and going).⁶¹ This included where the family house was used as a meeting place for the young peoples' friends which caused tension with the mothers.

Although young people in general were more likely to say there were too many rules in the family home, two YOT practitioners discussed cases where they felt there were no boundaries being set by the parent(s) and one other practitioner said she worked with a young person's mother on this issue.

Neighbourhood issues typically pertained to the people in the area, such as the young peoples' peers, trouble makers, drug users or neighbours. A number of young people had friends living nearby and although some of them thought that was good or important, a small number acknowledged that it could lead them to getting into trouble. Thus, some young people who had moved were relieved to be away from certain friends who could be a bad influence. Moving area also gave the young person a sense of being anonymous – meaning they could perhaps stay out of trouble.

R: If I carry on hanging around with them people I'll get sucked back in to what I used to do.

I: Right.

R: That's why I wanna stay well clear of them.

Young peoples' responses to being asked what is good or bad about their neighbourhoods also indicated how this affected them. For example, interviewees thought what was good about the neighbourhood related to proximity to places or people and a sense of safety or peace and quiet. What was considered bad about the neighbourhood were factors which affected their sense of safety, such as violent crime or general crime in the area, trouble makers or drug users.

R: ... The actual place is awful man. I hate it.

I: The local area you mean?

R: Yes.

I: What's wrong with the area?

R: It's just... At night, there's stabbings going like every other day like. There are stabbings going on a lot now.

...

I: Are you looking forward to being released next week?

⁶¹ Missing data for 22 percent.

R: To a certain extent, yes. But I've got a few worries about my old mates dragging me back down and the drugs and crime in my area.

Therefore, the responses of the young offenders appeared to be remarkably similar to those that any community safety survey might generate.

The issue of neighbours was also discussed in some interviews and complaints from neighbours had led on occasions to the young person (and sometimes the family) having to move. The nature of complaints included the young people's behaviour in the neighbourhood, loud or excessive noise or people calling at the house. Four cases of disputes had involved violence (one young person has had his house set alight twice) and two young people described how they had to leave the family home because of disputes with neighbours.

Interview data showed that 18 percent (n=28) of the sample had been on an Anti-Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) in the past 12 months. Those who were currently on an ASBO or had been in the last 12 months were less likely to have ever had housing problems.⁶² It is not clear why this might be, but may be worthy of further consideration as a part of data collection by the YJB. Certainly it could reflect that fewer young people had settled housing in this study than the general YOT population, or it may be that young people with ASBOs live in families where their behaviour does not lead to them being evicted by their mothers.

However, ASBOs were specifically mentioned as contributing to families being evicted and having to move in three cases:

R: ...I've been on an ASBO for four years.

I: Is that why you had to stop living with your mum? What happened?

R: Well I was living with my mum in [place name] and then like I just...I kept on like getting into trouble and shit and like getting arrested loads of time. And neighbours in the street like, 'cos they didn't like me innit. So they kept on reporting me to the council and that. Then I got an ASBO put on me and I breached my ASBO a couple of times... And then I got evicted. I was thrown out the house.

I: All of you?

R: Mhm.

I: Okay. And where did everyone go?

R: My mum and my sister went to a bedsit. I was just running riot. I weren't living nowhere. I just...

I: Didn't you want to stay at the bedsit with your mum and sister?

R: I weren't allowed.

⁶² Chi² Test: X=5.816, p.028, phi=0.198.

There were also a small number of cases where the young people found their neighbours intimidating or had been accused of stealing. Although other young people said they had never had problems with neighbours and described their neighbours as 'nice'.

Being asked to leave the family home

As discussed earlier, the mother was the most likely person to ask the young person in this study to leave home, although both parents, fathers and a step-father could also be involved. Interviews also showed that the youngest age a young person was thrown out was 13 and the oldest was 15; this is therefore younger than some other research has suggested (Evans, 1996⁶³; Taking Risks, 1999; JRF, 1997; Audit Commission, 1996).

Young people discussed how they had been thrown out because of arguments with either parent (mostly the mother) or a sibling and eight young people described how they had chosen to leave because of arguments or other problems in the home and two of these were young women. Arguments were focused on the young peoples' behaviour, for example offending (outside of the home), staying out late, substance use or a combination of these factors.

I: So you argued with your mum...

R: A lot.

I: A lot. About what kind of things?

R: Er all...

I: About lots of things?

R: Just all in general.

I: Okay and so what was the final straw, what did she say?

R: You leave the house 'cos I was grounded and I kept on nashing on. And she said 'If you leave the house again basically you can pack your bags and go' and I went on TWOC'ing⁶⁴.

...

I: Why were you asked to leave originally?

R: Because I kept getting nicked. Coming in drunk, off my nut. My mum didn't like it so they chucked me out.

I: Okay. What did she actually say to you?

R: 'Fuck off'. [Laughs] 'Get out the house'.

A study by Crisis (Randall and Brown, 2001) showed that 82 percent of young people had left the family home after an argument, also supported by Breugal and Smith, 1999. Most young people had experienced arguments over the same issues, sometimes over a period of years, before a crisis point was reached.

⁶³ Cited in Centrepoint 2002

⁶⁴ 'TWOC' refers to taking without consent.

Within the Crisis study, 40 percent of young people said their own violent or disruptive behaviour at home or school had been a problem and within this study there were a number of examples wherein the young people had seriously damaged the family house which led to them being thrown out (and at least two were arrested) and in other case physical fights with people in the family home caused them to lose their home.

However, being thrown out was not necessarily an end in itself and a number were then taken back in; for a proportion of young people this happened more than once. As discussed earlier, some YOT practitioners said that they worked with family members in situations such as these and family mediation work is a part of the YJB's forthcoming accommodation strategy. However this pattern can be very unsettling for young people:

I: In the last part of the interview you said that you were now living in foster care. Can you say how you came to be living there?

R: Because my friend's mum and dad just thought that my mum is gonna keep throwing me out then there is no point me living there...

I: ... you said that you were sort of homeless for a few days. How did that happen?

R: My mum threw me out because of another little argument. Then she'd have me back and that made me breach my curfew and my tag then I got in trouble for that. And then she'd have me back and threw me out. And then she had me back...And that's just...

It would seem that parents often use the threat of eviction as a means of trying to control young people's behaviour and demonstrating that continuing to stay at home is dependent on good behaviour (JRF, 1997). Further, although this study indicates that young offenders between the ages of 13-15 were most likely to be asked to leave the family home, once they reach the age of 16, parents' views about their obligations to their children can change and it is seen as an acceptable age for the young person to leave home. Thus for two young people their parents were waiting for them to turn 16 and in one case a young person's mother called him from abroad to tell him to leave just before his birthday.

I: If you don't mind me asking, what's going on with you and your mum? Do you get on with her?

R: No... What it were, my mum and dad just argued all the time so my mum kicked my dad out. Then she forced my sister to leave. Then she were ready to kick me out on my 16th birthday but what it was she met a bloke on [the] internet on and she booked a flight for 21st May erm and my birthday were on 22nd so I didn't see her for my birthday...Then er she went 'When I come back I don't want you there'.

I: She said that to you?

R: Yeah over the phone... Then she went 'If you are there, then...'

I: Do you know why?

R: 'Cos it were my 16th birthday... She'd been ready to kick me out erm for the last four months before my birthday... But she just like being wanting my er child

benefit money and so something about divorce or something with my dad's er... My dad couldn't do [anything] to my mum if I were living there. So once I was 16... Once she got the house sorted out, all the deeds signed over in her name, then she kicked me out.

I: Mhm. Does she know where you are now?

R: Yeah.

I: Okay and does she contact you?

R: It's I... It's always me who [has] to contact my family, they never contact me. So like if I want to talk to them I phone them.

Care histories

Asset data were analysed for the overall sample and the Core Profile part of the forms contains a section about young peoples' care histories and this is represented in the table below (Fig. 2.3). Some fields will contain an 'overlap' as a number of different circumstances can apply to the same individual. Furthermore, the data may under-represent how many young people have been in care as *Asset* fields have not been completed. In four fields the number of cases in which data are missing is over 100 individuals (highlighted in italics).

In interview 49 percent of young people told researchers they had been 'in care' and 71 percent said they had ever had a social worker – this would indicate that care history is not difficult to ascertain from young people pending further exploration and that the official data seriously under-represents the true picture. It is not clear why this might be. However, it suggests there could be serious consequences, with regard to accommodation needs, and general welfare issues. This may become especially important if the YJB accommodation strategy encourages family mediation and resettlement in the family home; a lack of a full care history could potentially place the young person at risk. We would suggest therefore that this gap is given full consideration if this strategy is to be adopted.

Fig. 2.3 The care histories of the young offenders identified as having accommodation difficulties according to their *Assets* (n= 257)

Care history	% of young people (n)	% of missing data (n)
Accommodated by voluntary agreement of parents	24 (62)	34 (86)
Subject to a care order	10 (26)	37 (95)
Remanded to Local Authority care	16 (41)	35 (91)
Ever been on the Child Protection Register	20 (50)	43 (110)
Ever been referred to or had contact with social services	46 (119)	39 (101)

Siblings who have had social services involvement	28 (73)	50 (129)
Looked after within the past 12 months	7 (19)	44 (114)

This study sample's own reported contacts with social services and 'in care' experiences were significantly higher than those recorded on *Asset* (which was already high). There were no significant differences between young men and young women in the study regarding whether they had experienced any of the care history circumstances mentioned in Fig 2.3. This was also the case between the ethnicities of the young people.

Where do young people go after leaving the family home?

Within the interview sample, 76 percent said they had lived with someone other than their parents, for example a carer or other family member. 73 percent of all young men and 88 percent of all young women in the interview sample said this was the case (this was not a significant difference). However, young people who categorised themselves as 'white' were more likely to have lived with someone other than their parents compared to those from non-white ethnic groups.⁶⁵

When young people left the family home (whether they ran away, were told to leave or did so of their own accord⁶⁶), they went to one or more of the following places:

- Into 'care' (for example, foster care, children's homes, residential homes);
- Another family member;
- A friend's house.

In addition, some young people might sleep rough for a period of time or go into emergency or temporary accommodation (this is discussed in detail in subsequent chapters).

Offending and Substance Use

As shown in Fig 2.4 below, *Asset* data showed that the most common type of recent primary offence was violence against the person. Further, the offending was in general of a more serious, rather than less serious nature.

⁶⁵ Chi² Test: X=6.409, p0.011, phi=0.222.

⁶⁶ Some young people may also go from the family home into custody. It might be possible for them to return home or they might have to be resettled elsewhere and this is discussed later in the report.

Fig 2.4 Most recent primary offences of the study sample according to their Assets (n=257)

Offence type	% of young people (n)
Violence against the person ⁶⁷	17.5 (45)
Burglary (domestic and non-domestic)	13.2 (34)
Theft and handling	12.8 (33)
Robbery	9.7 (25)
Motoring offence ⁶⁸	9.3 (24)
Public order	6.2 (16)
Vehicle theft	6.2 (16)
Criminal damage (including arson)	5.4 (14)
Other	5 (13)
Breach of order (including ASBO)	3.9 (10)
Drug offence	3.5 (9)
Fraud/ forgery	1.6 (4)
Sexual offence	1.2 (3)
Missing data	4.2 (11)

NB Percentages do not add up to 100 due to rounding errors.

Offending was also analysed qualitatively and there was no apparent pattern to the data which associated living arrangements / accommodation with offending. A small number of interviewees said this directly, indicating that their accommodation made no difference to their behaviour. However, for some young people their offending was associated with where they were living and this was most commonly related to the family home, particularly tense or stressful relationships or the proximity to offending peers:

I smashed my mum's house up... When I was about fourteen... My mum's proper... religious nut yeah like ... 'You will go to church' ... I'm completely the opposite, yeah... Me and her did not get on at all and she just like 'You'll be in 7 o'clock at night.' I was like 'I'm nearly fifteen', yeah, your... I mean there's no way I'm coming in at 7 o'clock at night that's embarrassing, yeah. I was like 'do you realise how embarrassing that is for me and my friends yeah' ... She locked the door and tried to bounce me head off the door so I give her a clap and smashed the house up just like raged and like smashed the house up like instead of going livid on her or my sisters or something. Do you know what I mean? She phones the old bill got me nicked. [Huh] Cheeky cow.

Living at home appeared, in qualitative interview, to provide the clearest link to offending behaviour; it also presented a broad range of offending types, from TWOC, robbery, assault on a police officer, burglary, criminal damage and shoplifting.

⁶⁷ Violence against the person includes possession of a weapon.

⁶⁸ This includes one case of causing death or injury by reckless driving and four other driving offences.

The young people in this study sample who offended in care settings did so because of peers and feelings of stress and three young people thought their offending was worse there. It is of note that the young peoples' demonstration of aggression against property or people was more likely to happen in care than in the family home. There was also an apparent link between those in the sample committing violent offences and living in temporary accommodation. Young people in qualitative interview were more likely to describe violent offences such as fighting when they were in B&B or hostel accommodation, but not when living with friends. This theme of aggression and violence is considered in more depth in the following chapter.

Just one interviewee said that their offending arose from 'boredom' because they were living alone; and just six gave boredom as the motivation for their offending and three because it was 'fun' or a 'buzz'.

Of the young people who gave other reasons for their offending in qualitative interview, these included:

- 15 young people related their offending to anger, for protection or as a response to provocation,
- 15 to money,
- eight to 'stupidity'
- seven to peer pressure,
- five 'did not know',
- four to hunger or necessity,
- and one each for respect, rebellion, drugs, or choice.

Thirty three young people said they had offended with friends and this could be one friend, a group or friends they live with. Ten young people said they offended alone (although some of these had also offended with friends, family or other residents). Two young people had offended with family members:

R: It's a very sociable thing.

I: Crime?

R: You know, it is, it is a very sociable thing.

The relationship between offending and substance use was not a clear one and not prevalent in this study. Some young people interviewed did make an association however suggesting that they had been drinking alcohol before committing an offence and there also appeared to be aggression or anger issues in most of these cases. Young people interviewed described alcohol making them lose control and as an outlet for anger, however it was also seen as a social activity.

R: Well I got drunk twice in the last two, three weeks and both of them times I got arrested.

I: What for?

R: For fighting. So I tend not to drink if I can help it. I just let all the anger out. I just let all my anger out when I'm drunk.

A limited number of young people described Class A substance use in interview; *Asset* data also shows limited levels of use, however there is a significant amount of missing data as can be seen below:

Fig 2.5: Substance use amongst the sample of young offenders identified as having accommodation difficulties according to *Asset* (n=257):

Substance	% who have used at least once	% Missing data
Tobacco	69	23
Alcohol	68	18
Solvents	9	36
Cannabis	64	24
Ecstasy	23	37
Amphetamines	14	40
LSD	6	41
Poppers	5	41
Cocaine	13	41
Crack	7	41
Heroin	5	41
Methadone	4	44
Tranquilisers	2	53
Steroids	2	53

Where young offenders in this study referred to or talked about drugs it was principally cannabis use. Most young people who used illicit substances did so with other people and most reported use of tobacco, alcohol and cannabis. In the SEU (1998) study, young people who had occasionally and repeatedly run away from their accommodation were three and seven times respectively more likely to be in trouble with the police than those who had not run away. Graham and Bowling (1997) found that offending started at about the same age as other antisocial behaviours, including running away, truancy and substance use.

In our study, there was no link between age of first substance use and offending as evidenced by a Final Warning or Reprimand. Nonetheless, their use of tobacco, alcohol or cannabis is statistically more likely to occur before first conviction. Thus although there is no apparent pattern between young offenders with accommodation difficulties beginning to use one of these substances and when they offend, they are statistically

likely to use at least one substance before they receive their first conviction; the average age for first use of tobacco was 12 years and for cannabis and alcohol 13 years.

However, the data derived from *Asset*⁶⁹ ‘likelihood ratings’ showed a significant difference in the *Asset* score given in relation to substance misuse between those individuals who have identified themselves in interview as having ever been homeless, lived alone or in supported lodgings at some point in their lives and those that did not⁷⁰. Further, the substance misuse *Asset* score is significantly greater for those that self-define themselves as ever being homeless.⁷¹

For those interviewees who did use substances more regularly or seriously, nine linked their drug use to offending and four said they had offended in order to pay for drugs. Generally, where drug use led to offending, these were thefts, burglaries or taking without consent (TWOC).

Within this study’s sample, eight percent had been convicted of a Schedule 1 offence^{72, 73}, and two percent were on the sex offenders register.⁷⁴ The rise in young people convicted of Schedule 1 offences is a complex issue. As we have explored in a forthcoming study on young women for the YJB it may be that more prosecutions are being pursued for assaults on or between young people than would have previously been the case; this has serious implications for young people with regard to housing issues. As discussed in the housing provider survey (chapter 4) a Schedule 1 offence is still a debaring factor for many types of accommodation; this is an area therefore which we would suggest is worthy of further exploration at a research and practice level.

It has been detailed above that a number of young people in the study had witnessed or experienced violence in the family home. Five young people who had spoken about such experiences had also committed a violent offence.⁷⁵

Reasons given by young people for committing violent offences tended to be because the young people felt provoked or needed to protect themselves. However, in some cases, the act of aggression or violence appeared to be an over-reaction or the young person could not control their anger. There also appeared to be a sense of bravado about committing a violent offence which will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁶⁹ In total both interview and *Asset* data was available for 137 people.

⁷⁰ Mann-Whitney Test: (Z=-2.488, p=0.013)

⁷¹ Mann-Whitney Test: (Z=-2.657, p=0.010)

⁷² A Schedule 1 offender is a person who has committed one of the crimes listed in Schedule 1 in the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, where the victim is a child or a young person. See glossary for further information.

⁷³ Data were missing for 10 percent. There was no significant difference between the number of young men and women or between the ethnic groups of young people convicted of Schedule 1 offences.

⁷⁴ Data were missing for eight percent. There was no significant difference between the number of young men and women or between the ethnic groups of young people on the sex offenders register.

⁷⁵ This could be an under-representation as it relates to those who actively discussed it – we did not ask this question.

Chapter 3: Experiencing accommodation difficulties

Chapter 3 is based on the experiences of the young offenders interviewed in this study who were no longer living in the parental home and had, therefore, been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and / or support. It reflects on their experiences when homeless and living in temporary accommodation. This chapter considers what young offenders themselves felt made accommodation suitable or unsuitable and compares this with the views of practitioners and providers gathered during the course of the study.

The sampling strategy for this study targeted young people with vulnerability to, or known housing issues and the strategy was effective in identifying young people with accommodation problems. Thus, 75 percent of the sample had lived with someone other than a parent at some time in their lives. Additionally 40 percent were or had been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and / or support⁷⁶ and 25 percent could be defined as in housing need, but not yet having experienced actual homelessness. This is substantially different than for the general population and for the YOT population. The latter is illustrated by comparison with the Audit Commission's (2004) findings, that one third of young people under the supervision of a YOT did not live with their parents. We were therefore able to use the YOT risk criteria⁷⁷ to identify young people with a range of housing needs, from the immediate to those in problematic but not urgent situations.

As all interviewees were aged 18 years or less when interviewed, not living with a parent is out of the ordinary and is different from the general population. Unfortunately, there appear to be no clear or directly comparable figures for children and young people⁷⁸ as a whole for the UK but figures for 2001 from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) would suggest that approximately 1.5 percent of children and young people did not live with a parent and / or lived in a 'communal' setting such as in a local authority residential home. Further, figures for 2004 suggest that more than 90 percent of those aged 19 and under lived within a 'married couple' family unit or with a 'single parent'.

Other studies have suggested that there is considerable mobility for young people who are not living with a parent (Nacro Cymru, 2006; YJB, 2004; Home Office, 2003). For those young people whose living situation is not stable the studies report levels of

⁷⁶ Our definition includes those who are 'street' homeless, those in temporary accommodation and those living independently; this is discussed later in more detail.

⁷⁷ Discussed in the introduction in detail, but the three scores from *Asset* which were chosen were for living arrangements; family relationships and neighbourhood.

⁷⁸ As noted earlier children and young people are not consistently defined across agencies and organisations that collate or gather information on accommodation status which makes it very difficult to offer a definitive comparison with this sample. What is indicated is that, proportionately, young people in the sample were more likely to live somewhere other than with a parent than would be likely for the general population.

movement similar to those found in this sample; thus reported movements were between two and more than 20 times in a year. The suggestion is that once an unsettled pattern of living is established it can be difficult for young people to move away from an apparently 'itinerant' lifestyle; moving from one form of accommodation to another, between family and friends and on occasions experiencing total homelessness.

Frequency of movement between accommodation types was in this study recorded by calendar for a twelve-month period⁷⁹. Interestingly, the calendars did not show a different pattern of living arrangements in the last year for those in custody, than from those in the community. They were neither more nor less stable. Other research studies have suggested that between 25 percent and 60 percent of young people in custody had been homeless, in temporary accommodation, or had unstable living arrangements prior to their sentence (SEU, 2002 and Nacro, 1998 respectively). The implication is that this is an elevated rate than for the general offending population and that custody can exacerbate accommodation difficulties (JRF, 1996). Our study did not show this pattern however, which might be because we were studying a population whose living arrangements were already unstable.

Those young offenders who were or had been on remand in the last year showed a different pattern from the general sample. Nine calendars showed remands into custody⁸⁰ and thus the data should be treated with caution, however just two young people returned to the parental home following remand; the rest to children's homes (3), other family member (2), independent home (1), and homeless (1). Research by Lader et al (2000) has suggested that young males on remand were most likely to have suffered a significantly stressful episode in their lives in the six months prior to the remand episode; this included 61 percent reporting running away from home and 46 percent having been homeless. Given the high numbers of young people in this sample running away and suffering stressful family relationships (as discussed in the previous chapter), the indications from the remand data may be worthy of further exploration. Just one young person from the nine had lived in the parental home prior to the remand episode and also returned there, two others lived in the parental home, but were released to children's homes.

The issues of custody and accessing accommodation are discussed further in the following chapter.

Homelessness

Street homelessness⁸¹ as an issue for young people is a muted one. Although 40 percent of the study sample had experienced accommodation difficulties, such that they deemed

⁷⁹ Discussed in full in chapter 2

⁸⁰ We think that this is an under-reporting based on the way in which data was recorded – thus some interviewers may have recorded 'custody' rather than 'remand in custody'.

⁸¹ We have used the term 'street homelessness' to denote when the young person had no place at all to stay. This was important as we wanted to ensure that it was understood that those who were also in temporary or itinerant forms of housing might also be 'homeless'.

themselves currently or recently homeless⁸², this was as we have seen a considerable under-representation of the unsettled nature of the sample's housing situations. Other recent studies have indicated that between two and five percent of young people were described as usually or currently being of no fixed abode (Nacro, 2006; Baker et al, 2002) and thus our sample showed a significantly higher rate reflecting their more problematic accommodation experiences compared to the general YOT population. Nonetheless, they did not typically describe themselves as 'homeless'. Our study would suggest that 'homelessness' is, for young people, about running out of any other possible alternative. This may take quite some time and for most young people their situation may be unsettled or unsatisfactory, but they will not see themselves as 'homeless' until all options are exhausted and there really is nowhere else to go:

I: Just to kind of recap that generally you've been NFA since last September and generally you stay at friends' houses?

R: Yeah.

I: But a different place all the time?

R: Yeah.

I: But you have stayed on park benches?

R: Yeah, when I've had to. If there's been like nobody where I can go or nuffin' I can do ... Straight like if there's just nowhere to stay, got to go and fucking... you have to find somewhere don't you?

It appears that homelessness is commonly masked by being offered accommodation by extended family and family friends, friends or friends' families. The young offenders sampled did not generally describe themselves in this situation as 'homeless'. Homelessness for young offenders was strongly associated with 'exhausting' the supply of family and friends – street homelessness or any form of formal temporary accommodation was defined by the sample as 'homeless'. The quotation below from an interview with a young person highlights how this works:

R: OK. And in the last part of the interview we did talk about one occasion where you were actually homeless, where you had no roof over your head for the night. How did that happen?

R: I didn't have nowhere to stay.

I: You'd sort of...? There was no one that could...?

R: There was no one at all. I'd just been round everyone so....

I: You'd exhausted the supply?

R: Yeah.

⁸² According to this study's definition of homelessness (see page 4).

The findings indicate therefore that this is an area for practitioners and policy makers to note; asking young offenders about homelessness requires careful phrasing in order to accurately identify the risk and the status of their living arrangements.

There was no significant difference between the number of males and females who had ever experienced homelessness or who had sought formal housing provision and / or support⁸³. However, when these three types of housing problem are considered separately, significantly more females than males had experienced homelessness.⁸⁴ As we will see this is at odds with what providers reported in focus groups and this may indicate a reason for more widespread female homelessness; it is not clear if young females with housing problems do not seek temporary accommodation, or whether it is not provided. We would suggest that this is an area requiring further investigation. There were no significant differences in the numbers of males and females who had ever lived alone or in temporary accommodation.

Fig 3.1: Accommodation difficulties by gender

	Males	Females	
Homelessness	36% (46/127)	60% (15/25)	Significant
Lived Alone	31% (39/127)	28% (7/25)	Not significant
Supported/unsupported accommodation	16% (20/127)	16% (4/25)	Not significant
Any housing problem	53% (67/127)	72% (18/25)	Not significant

This corresponds with the fact that there was no significant difference in the numbers of males and females who had been in care, or the number who had lived with someone other than their parents. Similarly, there was no significant difference in the numbers of males and females whose families had ever had a social worker. This would suggest a need to look further at female street homelessness and the reasons for it.

The findings are congruent with ‘Taking Risks’ (1999) which found that young people with unstable family backgrounds, a high degree of family reconstitution and who had lived with another relative, were more likely to experience potential future homelessness. In addition that study suggested that ‘*farming young people out*’ to live with a relative when problems occurred at home was a reasonably common response, which could begin at age 12 and was more common by age 16. They suggested that ethnicity could be a factor in this, with the pattern most common amongst black children, but noted in other mixed descent, African and white groups. In this sample there was no significant difference in the ethnicity of young people who have ever experienced a housing

⁸³ As discussed earlier, the young offenders interviewed in this study who had accessed temporary accommodation such as hostels, could rarely differentiate between those that were said to offer supported living and those that offered unsupported accommodation. For the purpose of analysis, therefore, the two were amalgamated.

⁸⁴ Chi² Test: X=3.976, p.0.046, phi=0.180

problem, although those of white ethnicity were more likely to have lived with someone other than their parents compared to young people of a non-white ethnic group.⁸⁵

Of the 61 young people (40 percent) sampled who said they had ever been 'homeless', 72 percent (n= 44) said they had been helped out of the situation⁸⁶, principally by friends or the family of friends (13/44) who commonly gave them somewhere to stay. Additionally, nine young people were helped by family members, who might for example take them back into the home, allow them to stay for a short while or access alternative accommodation. Nine people were helped by housing professionals such as housing projects, housing associations or the council; accommodation found included B&B, a flat and a hostel. Two young people were helped by the criminal justice system, one moving into secure accommodation and another receiving a Referral Order with a condition that they be accommodated by their father. The pattern of being helped principally by family and friends, such that the young person does not have to sleep rough mirrors that found in other studies, such as that by the SEU (1998) and Baker et al (2002).

Many young people interviewed described a mixture of problems and anxieties when they were homeless, which ranged across physical and mental health and social issues – such that 31 percent said they had experienced poor physical health⁸⁷ when homeless, 66 percent felt depressed and 48 percent felt hungry. Many also felt lonely (39 percent), frightened of other people (21 percent) and had been a victim of crime (15 percent). This was congruent with findings by the Mental Health Foundation (2000) which suggested that the impact of homelessness on young people's lives can be considerable, including placing them at risk of physical and mental health problems and being a victim of crime.

In interview young people who had been homeless described 'walking around' during the night and whilst the majority denied feeling scared at this time in the structured interview, the impression created in the semi-structured interviews was that their responses were often tinged with bravado. Although some continued to suggest that they had not been afraid, others described why or how they were scared when homeless:

They attacked me at one point. They scared me a couple of times in it and attacked me another time. Cut all me head.

.....

Never knowing what's gonna happen. Obviously there's people out there, mental, sick people. Someone can easy come up and stab you in the back or whatever innit like. There's paedophiles out there.

⁸⁵ Chi2 Test: X=6.409 , p0.011 , phi=0.222.

⁸⁶ There was no significant difference in this area between those from different ethnic groups or between males and females.

⁸⁷ This included weakness, weight loss, headaches, colds, asthma, shingles and aches and pains.

Others described how they often walked around because they were fearful of going to sleep. There are sometimes additional problems which are not just about safety, but are about comfort as this quote illustrates:

Well I've slept, but I'd always wake up like aching 'cos it's so uncomfortable. You don't get enough sleep anyway. ... You wake up really early,...the sun or brightness in the sky just wakes you up before you should get up five, six o'clock. You know and then you're gonna walk around for like four or five hours before anyone else wakes up, you know, it's quite hard to do.

Young people also talked about being hungry and could describe a longing for fresh food and the problems with obtaining or cooking food and their concerns about the impact of fast food on their own health:

I: And how did you cope with being homeless?...

R: I had no money to get something to eat.

Or:

I: So how do you feel about living in your car?

R: Yeah it's better than the home...

I: OK. Is there anything bad about it?

R: No. Except it's cold and that. Bit hungry and that.

And:

R: Yeah, oh I'd love to make my own fresh food and stuff. I love fresh food. I'd like really...I'd like junk food, yeah, but it's nice like once a week.

These findings again mirror those noted in other studies (Home Office, 2003; Barnados, 2003; Centrepoint, 2002) which all suggest that young people who are homeless experience problems with eating properly, healthily and sufficiently. In this sample 48 percent of young people said they had been hungry when homeless and a lack of adequate and healthy food will of course have an effect on young people's physical and mental health. Centrepoint (2002) suggested that hunger could impede the ability to sleep properly and concentrate; their sample also reported feeling tired, depressed and losing weight. The impact on physical health is moreover an important consideration and within this sample the *Asset* scores for physical health were greater for those that self-defined themselves as ever being homeless. Further, although these results are not statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level, they verge on significance.⁸⁸ It would indicate that this may be an important area for practitioners to review and focus on when working with this group of young people; it also highlights another area of vulnerability for them.

⁸⁸ Mann-Whitney Tests: Physical health (Z=-1.866, p=0.062)

The feelings of fear when sleeping rough discussed earlier were also noted by Centrepont (2002) and in addition they highlighted how this might lead young people to sleep in derelict buildings and cars, in order to feel more secure, and less easily accessed by others. Again our study supported those findings with similar issues raised by respondents. Places to stay ranged from garden sheds, the loading bays of shopping centres, cars and car parks:

R: Car parks usually all right as well 'cos like that car park was all right anyway 'cos once you get in like the gates are locked at a certain time, so if you can get in before the gates are locked you're locked in until six so no other cunt can get in to piss you off or nothing so it's quite cushi.

....

I: So where do you actually sleep? What sort of places were you sleeping?

R: Sheds and that.

I: Sheds?

R: Yeah.

I: Like garden sheds or...?

R: Yeah.

Other studies have suggested that young people with housing problems are more likely to become involved in petty crime, such as begging, stealing and prostitution. Further, they suggested that young people are also more likely to become victimised and it is these fears which we have seen reflected. Interestingly, young people in this study were more likely to report having been a victim of crime when in supported lodgings than when actually homeless; 15 percent of young people in this study who had ever been homeless said they were a victim of crime at that time, compared with 21 percent of those who had lived in supported lodgings. This may be for a number of reasons:

- because the young people take considerable evasive action when homeless,
- because they are often engaged in activities with friends when homeless,
- and / or because they are often accommodated with older or unknown people in supported housing which places them at greater risk or less able to take evasive or self-protecting action.

Nonetheless this finding is a factor which should be noted and which does have practice implications. We have not found this discussed in other literature, which might suggest that this is unusual or that the data has not been aggregated in this way before; it should therefore be treated with caution, but is worthy of further exploration.

Fear, a lack of security and a lack of any sense of predictability are not the only feelings which young people discussed in relation to homelessness. The aimlessness and dependence on others which homelessness can engender was also illustrated by this young person:

...like walked around the day for a bit. Waited for all me mates to come out and they.... And when their mums went to work, just go in and have a quick wash and get changed and that in one of me mate's clothes.

There appears to be little, in research terms, which has reflected on the daily lived experience of homelessness and to which this dependence and rootlessness can be directly compared to. Our findings do however appear to suggest a reason for depression which is highlighted by the majority of the young people (66 percent), as the experience appears to be one of powerlessness and aimlessness, combined with high levels of anxiety to 'be alert':

Its just the noises innit. You don't know what some crack-head's going to try and do something. Just got to stay alert. That's the only thing I could do. Just want to stay alert.

The mental and physical strain of homelessness, when combined with being hungry and cold would be likely to have a considerable impact on a young person's well-being then and in the future. This of course only reflects on the homelessness experience and not the reasons for homelessness, which may be linked to depression, or anxiety. This sample also had high levels of having been 'in care' and / or having suffered from abuse and victimisation.

There was also a link made in the qualitative interviews between substance use, being homeless and night-time:

R: I'd stop doing drugs if I had accommodation, but if I was homeless and I was working I couldn't 'cos it's hard to sleep when you're homeless. That's why...

That's why I got into drugs.

I: Trying to get to sleep?

R: Yeah. No, to stay awake all night 'cos I won't stay out 'cos I'm all on my own. I'd rather stay awake all night than go to sleep in a... bench in a bus stop or something.

I: Right. So when do you sleep? During the day?

R: Yeah.

Although the different sources of data in this study would appear to suggest that substance use is not an explanatory factor for serious accommodation difficulties or street homelessness, it appears probable that there is a relationship between them⁸⁹. Further, the qualitative data would suggest that this is because substance use helped the young people in this study to cope with those experiences, especially that of being out at night. This would also make it probable that the levels of loneliness, fear and depression are under-

⁸⁹ As discussed in Chapter 2 those who had acute accommodation difficulties at some point in their lives were more likely to have a higher current *Asset* score in relation to substance use. Further, the substance misuse *Asset* score is significantly greater for those that self-define themselves as ever being homeless.⁸⁹

stated by young people who experience homelessness, because they learn to 'cope' with these feelings and that this may be through the use of substances or by not talking about or identifying them:

It's not... it's not frightening, just more pissed off, that's what it is. I'd like... I think I'm too pissed off to be bloody frightened of anyone, do you know what I mean? It's just like I reckon if someone saw me in a mood like that I think they'd just go away anyway, do you know what I mean? You could be stabbed just sitting in the corner you know.

Or, this young person who had been homeless for sometime and slept in a tent:

I: Have you ever... You know have you ever had to sleep in a car or in a bus shelter, or a door way or something like that?

R: No. I wouldn't sleep man. I just, don't like. I'd never sleep on the streets, never. I could never lower myself that low, I've been low, I've stooped low but not that low. Fuck that. I couldn't... I couldn't do it.

Thus young people's sense of self, what is admissible in terms of fear and how to behave appropriately when homeless are complex and inter-related factors.

The links with crime and homelessness were not strongly reported and appeared to result from attempts to deal with the experience:

R: I didn't do nothing. I know the enclosed premises I was guilty of because I was honest with that and breach of bail, but going equipped was just silly because I was just looking for a place to sleep that night.

I: What did you have on you?

R: A torch and a Walkman.

And:

I: Why were you offending then?

R: To eat.

I: Was it always just to eat or did you steal other things as well.

R: Just to eat.

I: Okay. But the offences you committed in the past, they're not just always for food are they?

R: No.

I: Okay.

R: Since I've been homeless they've been just for food.

This would appear to accord with previous research in this area, which indicated that young people with nowhere to stay and little money are more likely to become involved in petty crime (SEU, 1998; Nacro, 1993). We will discuss offending further later in this chapter.

Temporary Housing

Young people can experience temporary forms of housing in a variety of ways and these were all reflected in the research findings. It can be a short term expedient which answers difficulties encountered on a regular, if occasional basis following arguments with parents, and this appeared to principally involve short periods at friends. However, the need for temporary accommodation can arise as part of a pattern of disrupted family relationships which might also have involved periods 'in care', with moves into and out of the family home over a number of years. Finally, temporary accommodation can be the only solution because of the need for a complete change, usually as the result of difficulties with one or both parents or a step-parent, but which might also follow bereavements or other experiences. As we have seen in the previous chapter it is usually the mother who makes the final decision that the young person can no longer stay in the family home. When this occurs, our findings indicate that the young person becomes completely dependent upon the provision afforded by friends, family or social housing responses and care.

The needs of young offenders vary in terms of the amount of 'time' they will need assistance for and the range of responses which might be required. *Asset* recording reflected this range of need and showed ten percent of the sample to be of no fixed abode and 37 percent to have other problems with their living arrangements, such as uncertainty over the length of stay there; this appeared therefore to under-record accommodation problems for this sample. Other studies have shown lower levels of unsettled living patterns varying between seven and 15 percent (Nacro, 2006; Nacro Cymru, 2006) but again they probably reflect the more general YOT population and help to illustrate the particular problems for those with more acute difficulties.

There were no significant differences across ethnic groups or between males and females⁹⁰ with regard to any of these factors. However, as discussed, housing legislation and policy does not necessarily recognise the range of need for young people in particular and that the acute need may be for short periods, but then resolved within the family and that this pattern appears particular to young people. Additionally housing legislation can be inflexible and can create hurdles and obstacles which young people do not understand and do not know how to surmount. Given this the number of young people who access formal temporary housing includes those who have overcome the difficulties; it is perhaps not surprising that for many young offenders with accommodation difficulties the most common temporary accommodation is 'friends'.

The review of youth justice plans undertaken for this study found that a small number noted that prevention was central to the YOT's approach to dealing with the accommodation needs of young offenders. In these areas, supporting children within their families and preventing family breakdown was prioritised. Where there was a need for a placement outside the family home, the first port of call was to consider whether the

⁹⁰ The proportion of 'missing data' was 20 percent.

extended family or friendship networks could offer accommodation. In these areas the role of the accommodation officer had a different emphasis (see chapter 4), focusing on reducing risk (sometimes in conjunction with the parenting coordinator) as well as responding to the need for placements.

Temporary housing encompasses a range which includes, 'sofa-surfing' or accommodation with friends and family, B&B, supported and unsupported hostels, and when under 16 years children's homes and foster care⁹¹. In this study, it also included, however, a range of other accommodation such as a women's refuge, squat, respite care and a crack house.

Overall 31 young people discussed living with friends / friends' families in their semi-structured interview which demonstrated the breadth and resonance of this experience. Additionally, even though young people in the sample might have been told to permanently leave the family home and this could mean actual homelessness, parents would then, on occasions, allow short-term access to the home - *'my mum might have actually let me in .. maybe once or twice in like a week or so but that was just to have a sleep, shower and that's all.'*

Young people in this study sample also highlighted what other studies had shown, which was that accommodation difficulties could involve a number of moves and a considerable degree of impermanence:

*I: Is there anyone else you've lived with? [Other than parents]
R: Yeah. Friends. I have stayed with most of them.*

Moreover, even if those offering you shelter are kind, there is a dependence which can be difficult and a sense of temporariness which may lie behind the many moves which we have seen young people make:

Well, I always moving around and I just haven't... Well, you can't just... You stay at mates and then you can only stay there so long until the mums and that, you know... start thinking 'what are you doing here?' Do you know what I mean? [laughs] [whispers] 'Are you still here?' ..You just feel right out of place and sometimes they don't want you to go but you just feel like you have to.

Further, interviewees demonstrated the strain that living with friends could put on a relationship:

Because like with my friends when I lived with them, we'd get on worse than we did because like we're with each other 24/7. So I hate it....

⁹¹ Because the latter two were dealt with in the previous chapter, we will not include them in our discussion here.

Other young people interviewed considered that the adults whose houses they were staying in were not always suitable or a good influence and two young people described their friends' parents as 'drug users' and 'criminals'.

Suitability

Suitability of accommodation was an issue which young people in the sample referred to in terms of the accommodation offered in response to their housing crises. Their concerns focused on a range of issues which included feeling safe, clean, near enough to family or friends, with physical and mental 'space'. Their concerns with regard to formal temporary housing focussed principally on issues such as:

- Cleanliness and suitability of accommodation in general
- Other residents
- Staff
- Rules
- Loneliness

Their concerns were different from practitioners; the young people interviewed focused on the standard of accommodation provided across housing types whereas professionals were more likely to focus on the nature of provision (Nacro Cymru 2005). Young people therefore had quite particular concerns with regard to suitability and in this next section we will focus on those concerns.

Cleanliness

Cleanliness was a key issue for the young interviewees and something which emerged strongly from the qualitative data. It was deeply important to the young people, particularly with regard to formal temporary or independent accommodation. 16 young people talked about it, and this was entirely generated from young people's views. It strongly affected how they felt about the suitability and acceptability of the accommodation and appeared to reflect their own sense of worth – thus they were better than the 'shoddy' housing offered to them suggested:

R: I went to get in the shower yeah but I didn't look on the floor ...went to put my foot in that was a sight, urgh, there was about six needles just laying in this... in this shower and I just like and I'm supposed to use that shower.

I: How old were you?

R: That was when I was 15, 16.

Other young people in the study described concerns about the cleanliness of the furniture in accommodation to which they were allocated and how staff or providers would not allow them to change it, even when family had offered them more suitable (and clean) pieces. In hotels and B&Bs bedding went unchanged and '*mattresses are just full of pee stains, everything*'. Five young people talked about how they did the cleaning and this included taking their own bathroom cleaning products into the shared facilities.

Other residents

Young offenders also had more general concerns about whether accommodation offered to them was suitable. These included concerns about the safety of areas they were placed in, issues about violence in the area or housing, and that drug users were present.

Thus, two clear patterns emerged from the qualitative data. Young people in this study showed concern about the suitability of an area they were living in and the likelihood of encountering violence there. However, what predominated were descriptions of violence which they or other residents used and this related in particular to communal or group living situations such as hostels, B&Bs and children's homes.

From the structured interviews we know that 40 percent of the sample had ever been asked to leave a place they were living at, with 13 percent subsequently banned from that form of accommodation. In qualitative interview, 22 young people described having committed acts of violence or aggression. The young people were inclined to describe their own or others behaviour as reflecting a world of posturing, bravado and threats where it was necessary to be 'tough' or violent to ensure that no-one harmed you or took advantage of you. This showed a similar pattern to that which we have seen young people describe with regard to violent offending in chapter 2. Once again they were also most likely to represent their own violence as a response to 'provocation'. Additionally, there was a normalisation or acceptance of violence within these contexts:

R: some man stepped on my...he was on my shoelace and I told him to.. You know when you're walking and you can feel it. I turned my head and I was looking at him. And he looked at me like he didn't want to come off my lace. I nudged him off my lace. And he pushed me on my face. Just like that. I had to get a bit violent after that.

I: So why do you think you did it?

R: Why did I do it?...Because he touched me innit?"

This contrasted strongly with the young people's descriptions of living at home. It would seem that a substantial proportion of the young people interviewed were aggressors out of the family home and victims within it and certainly the element of previous victimisation in the home is congruent with other studies ('Taking Risks', 1999). As we have seen in chapter 2 a substantial proportion of this sample had been in care: a combination of *Asset* and interview data suggests that 33 percent (n=84) had been in care⁹², further it would seem that 45 percent had been victims of abuse.⁹³ Ten young people talked about these experiences of abuse and witnessing domestic violence in qualitative interview. Given how reticent young people usually are to discuss such issues in a one-off interview this should be given full consideration⁹⁴. Further, this element of victimisation within the

⁹² With regard to 27 percent (n=69) there was missing data.

⁹³ These figures are derived from *Asset* data with high numbers of missing data (i.e. regarding abuse, 25 percent of the data was missing).

⁹⁴ We also did not ask questions of the young people directly about their experiences of victimisation; the discussion was therefore generated by them on each occasion.

home has implications for practice as we have noted in chapter 2; a proper and adequate risk assessment should be undertaken if it is decided to look at accommodating the young person back in the family home, or to undertake reparative work with the family⁹⁵.

Violence by the young person within temporary accommodation was the principal reason for their eviction and nine talked about this; their behaviour included fighting with other residents and with staff. Three also talked about being violent (two in children's homes) but not being evicted. Violence by the young people appeared to be particularly correlated to hostels, B&B's and children's homes. One young woman discussed how she had stabbed an older man in a hostel setting, but felt staff had been culpable, as they had 'stood by' and watched him intimidate her:

He started it, yeah. The staff were there. They could have stopped it. It was a good ten minutes of pure arguing, yeah, before any fighting happened and the staff were standing there just sat there looking. Just like uh.

There was also a sense, however, that violence within these settings was often normalised by young people and that they did not necessarily regard it as offending:

*I: Have you ever been asked to leave a residential place, or anything like that?
R: Only because I've run away too much. Oh yeah, I punched a girl that I lived with before. And I [?got away with that] 'cos she was too scared to... She kept running away every time I was there. I'm a bit intimidating when I'm angry.*

The second area which emerged strongly was the very negative response which young people in this study gave regarding drug users; drug users were used to denote unsuitable, dirty accommodation, violence and threats:

The council give me some shoddy housing like a few years back. They put me in a guest house...All these brown-heads and that like banging on your door, 'Oh can I buy a spliff? I'll swap you a spliff for some brown'...Like I'd open the door and just be like 'fuck off'...'

.....

Basically all the people that were in this house were from 30 over, basically, yeah. I was the only person my age, yeah. They were all heroin addicts, yeah, and you could tell that you know like you'd see them coming out the fucking... like the pins would still be in their arms and stuff.."

Five young people specifically gave living with drug users as an example of what made a bad home and this was one of the largest response categories, equalled or slightly surpassed by people 'who aren't nice', tension and arguments and dirtiness⁹⁶. Three

⁹⁵ Especially as this is a core aim of the YJB accommodation strategy.

⁹⁶ Young people were simply asked 'what do you think makes a bad home' – they self-generated categories.

young people suggested that the best way to get on was to 'keep yourself to yourself'; all three were in B&Bs.

Staff

Staff and responses to staff were surprisingly absent from young people's discussions of temporary housing. They were usually mentioned in a negative sense as 'hiding' behind closed doors and taking decisions which the young person felt they had not been involved in. Thus one young woman discussed being evicted at 2am when she returned to the hostel and was simply not allowed back in:

I've got back now after being out clubbing and that, yeah do you know what I mean? Like two o'clock in the morning. Put my little card through the door. 'Why won't it let me in?', like. I'm locked out, like. My friend's put her card through the door. Hers has worked. I was like 'what's going on?' I've gone to walk in. All the staff have come running telling me you can't come in. 'You can't come back in you can't come back in'. I was like 'it's two o'clock in the morning. You're telling me now that I... I've been kicked out when you could have told me hours ago that I'd been kicked out and I could have found somewhere to sleep last night. It's now two in the morning. What the fuck am I supposed to do now?' 'It's not our problem'. I said 'well it's like a joke'.

Clearly this raises difficult issues for hostels and staff when dealing with young people, but there must also be considerations regarding duties of care when young people are evicted onto the streets in the early hours of the morning. Again this may be an area of practice which requires further consideration and development. Certainly, as we shall see in the next chapter, when staff are considered 'good' or good practice is described it is about engagement and interaction with the young person and a sense that someone went beyond their basic duties to help, or that they took time to make clear and explain why rules were in place and how they related to the young person:

Cos I rang up the [solicitors] and I said I didn't really understand their role... So I managed to go up to the [place and a worker] that was like allocated apparently, so she took me out for a coffee and stuff like that, yeah, and told me how it all worked you know. And why they had to ask so many questions. So that helped in one way really.

Poor practice in these settings as highlighted by young people in this study is about an apparent 'fear' or hiding from the young people, a lack of engagement and a sense that they do not care. However, there was evidence in the young people's interviews of intimidating or violent behaviour towards staff in temporary accommodation settings and this may account for the lack of staff engagement on occasions:

I: Why were you thrown out the Foyer?

R: Damage to my door, I kicked off my door and that because my key wouldn't work. Brandishing martial arts weapons around outside the Foyer, threatening behaviour.

Rules

Young people took a responsible attitude towards rules on the whole, especially those they perceived as 'fair' or which made them feel 'safe'. They usually considered that it was fair to not allow drink or drugs on premises and that violence and fighting should not be considered acceptable behaviour:

R: Yeah, it is I've like managed to sort out my life a bit more since I've been living there. It's... I don't know just made me grow up a bit more really. They're quite strict there as well, like they keep an eye on all your offending and fighting stuff like that, so they're on top.

I: Do you like that?

R: No, not really. I don't really like it, but I know that if someone doesn't make you do it I won't.

I: So it is a good thing?

R: Yeah.

The rules which were most likely to be perceived as unfair were those which related to the young person feeling they had little or no freedom; thus an inability to have visitors and curfews were usually considered unfair or simply made the young person feel less relaxed or 'at home'. Interestingly, curfew was also the family rule which two young people raised as causing conflict within their own home.

The inability to have visitors was raised with regard to the whole range of temporary housing from B&Bs, hotels, hostels and supported accommodation and this may be an area worthy of further consideration. After fighting and violence it was the main reason given by young people for having been evicted from temporary accommodation. One young person highlighted how flexibility made a difference however and did this by contrasting two types of accommodation he had been in:

R: And I've got a front door key...But up at [other place] you had to ring the bell. You had been in at a certain time....But I don't like people telling me what time I have to be in or what time I'm allowed to go out in morning...

I: And they don't do that [here]?

R: No...As long as you don't come back drunk or if you're... You are allowed visitors till 11 at night and as long as they're not causing violence or anything and you're allowed sleepovers you know.

The acceptance of rules on the whole is congruent with research by Smith and McVie (2004) which suggested that young people were less likely to be in conflict with their parents and less likely to engage in criminal or anti-social behaviour where the family had clear rules. Thus although young people here were in settings other than the family home, it may be that the perception of the necessity for that rule, its fairness and the equality with which it is applied is most important and thus that young people can and will differentiate between what is fair but appropriate and that which appears to constrain.

Loneliness

Loneliness was something which approximately a quarter of young people who were living alone and in temporary accommodation described and this was reflected in the qualitative interviews:

Just that living on my own innit, like I say all the other time I got my brother there ... my mum and that. It is a bit lonely now.

Additionally although reported levels of depression were lower than for those who were homeless, they were still high with between a quarter and a third of young people in the sample living alone or in temporary accommodation saying that they had been or were depressed.

The reporting of feelings of loneliness and depression by young people in this sample should be given consideration, for the quantitative data also showed a slightly greater mental health *Asset* score for those who said they had ever lived alone⁹⁷ and showed a statistically significantly greater score for those who said they had ever lived in supported lodgings⁹⁸. These findings would indicate that there may be raised mental health needs for this group of young people which YOT workers and the young people are aware of; it is not clear if those needs are being met or are taken into consideration with regard to their housing need.

The findings are also congruent with research by Crisis (2000) who cited the Housing Services Agency, which interviewed 50 homeless people whose resettlement had failed. In 25 percent of cases, people were unable to sustain a tenancy and the main causes given were loneliness and isolation, often related to a lack of choice about where they can live. This was closely associated with an inability to make new friends or the breakdown of existing friendships or relationships. The report also observed that homeless people were likely to have smaller social networks than the general population.

Young people in this study were often positive about living alone, where they had gained access to a permanent form of housing and were particularly pleased at being able to cook and clean for themselves. Nonetheless, they could still be intimidated by neighbours or concerned about the furniture they were allocated or had to use; independent living was not, therefore, a panacea. This should not be surprising when it is considered that the young offenders in the sample were all under 18 years⁹⁹ and the national average age for leaving home is 22 years (SEU 1998); furthermore most of the young people sampled had a history of disrupted family relationships and significant other difficulties in their lives.

⁹⁷ Although this result is not statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level, it is verging on significance - Mann-Whitney Test: (Z=-1.804, p=0.071)

⁹⁸ Mann-Whitney Test: (Z=-2.650, p=0.008)

⁹⁹ All were under 18 when selected.

Offending and temporary housing

As noted in chapter 2, the pattern relating to offending and accommodation was not a definitive or clear one. There was, however, an apparent link between young offenders in the study committing violent offences and living in temporary accommodation. Young people in qualitative interviews were more likely to describe violent offences such as fighting when they were in B&B or hostel accommodation, but not when living with friends. Nonetheless, living at home appeared in qualitative interview to provide the clearest link to offending behaviour; largely related to stresses and tensions within family relationships or proximity to peers.

Similarly tension and conflict in temporary accommodation could also be offence related. Thus theft from or by other residents could be particularly problematic, as this excerpt illustrates:

YP said she had been asked to leave accommodation lots of times She thought this might be because she often robs people.¹⁰⁰

And another respondent described having been evicted from accommodation because of theft from other residents.

Of those who had been homeless a small number discussed it in connection with offending and suggested that it created a necessity 'to commit more crime', but that cited was usually low level, such as shoplifting.

Experiences of care/ being looked after

Forty-nine percent of the interview sample said they had ever been 'in care'¹⁰¹ and 71 percent said that they had ever had a social worker¹⁰². In cases where reasons for being in care were given in interviews with young people and YOT practitioners, these were because of arguments with mothers; family difficulties; domestic violence; parental substance use; parents handing the young people to social services and the young people presenting at police stations and asking to be re-housed. 'One-off' reasons included the young person being physically abused and another young person not having anywhere to live for one night on release from custody. It is of note that YOT practitioners appeared to have considered whether the young people had been in care in scoring them for likeliness to re-offend in Living Arrangements.

Past studies have established a link between experiences of living in care and accommodation difficulties. Young people leaving the family home may have the

¹⁰⁰ When an interview could not be taped (for example when a YOI would not give permission to take a tape recorder in) notes were taken, as in this interview.

¹⁰¹ This equated to 46 percent of all young men and 60 percent of all young women in the interview sample – however, there was no significant difference.

¹⁰² This equated to 68 percent of all young men in the interview sample and 88 percent of all young women, but there was no significant difference.

opportunity to return there or be helped by parents into independent living, but care leavers lack this type of support.

The SEU study (1998) reported that between a quarter and a third of rough sleepers had been in local authority care, including those who had repeatedly run away whilst in care and who had been discharged from care early. In addition, young people tended to leave care earlier than they would if they were living at home, that is 18 years of age compared to the national average of 22. The SEU (2002) found that young people in care were more likely to run away than those who had only ever lived in the family home, estimating that nearly half of those in residential or foster care have run away at some point – although some of these young people might have run away before being in care. Childline (2002) reported that reasons for young people running away from care were being bullied or abused (by staff or other residents), arguments or feeling that other residents were being favoured.

Almost all young people in the interview sample who had been (or were currently) in care reflected the negative experiences highlighted in previous research. The main reason for disliking foster care related to rules; in general young people did not agree with those set. In fact, young people appeared more aggrieved by rules set by foster carers than those set by parents or other family members. Young people resented rules which encroached on their sense of freedom, independence or maturity, such as curfews or participating in 'family' activities:

I: Okay and you've described being in care? When was this?

R: When I was in care? A couple of years ago.

I: How long were you in care for?

R: I was in about ten different places... 'cos I didn't like none of them.

I: Over what kind of period of time?

R: Oh about a month. And I just kept on walking away from all of them.

I: Why?

R: 'Cos they was doing my nut. It's nasty kind of living with someone that you don't know. Like, eating dinner at the table, fuck all that shit. I'm not like that. Can't do that.

Others disliked being in care because of foster carers or staff and other residents who were either mistreating the young person or a bad influence on them:

I got loads of trouble at the children's home. I don't like it there. I don't like living with other people. Other kids and that, I see them every day and I don't get my own space... Because people there don't get on with me. You sort of basically get racist behaviour.

As indicated in the quotes above, young people might walk out of or run away from care and in a small number of cases this could contribute to interviewees having been in a high number of different placements (for example, one young person had been in 43).

Similar to living in temporary accommodation some young people in the sample also exhibited aggressive behaviour while they were in care which could lead to them being made to leave. This behaviour manifested in either committing acts of criminal damage within the accommodation or violence or intimidation against other residents and staff:

I: Can you tell me about the last time you committed an offence?

R: It was before I got arrested. I beat some girl up.

I: What was that about?

R: She wound me up. And lied to my mates about me.

I: Oh right. You mean trying to sort of spread...gossip or something?

R: Yeah.

I: Did you get caught for that offence?

R: That was... I got the assault charge dropped and just got charged with breaking an ASBO.

I: And where were you living at the time when you committed that offence?

R: [name] children's home in [place name].

Experiences of living with other family members and friends

Experiences of ever living with family members who were not parents were mentioned in 27 interviews and *Asset* data showed that eight percent of the overall sample had been mostly living with 'other family' over the past six months.

Young people usually moved to live with other family members for the same reasons that they moved generally; that is because of arguments with parents, family tensions or disagreements about the young persons' behaviour. Respondents also went to live with family members after experiencing bereavement. In the majority of cases, the other family members were grandparents, followed by older sisters, then aunts and uncles and finally cousins. There appeared to be a higher incidence of returning to parents from living with other family members than for those leaving care placements – however, this could be for short periods of time only.

Experiences tended to be positive where young people had lived with grandparents (particularly grandmothers) and none of them mentioned arguments or tension. However, there were a small number of cases in which the grandparents could not cope with the young peoples' behaviour and they had to contact social services or return them to their parents' homes.

Information about living with siblings, aunts and uncles and cousins was not substantial, however a small number of cases showed this was not always positive. Three young people recalled mentally or physically abusive experiences of living with aunts.¹⁰³

Asset data showed eight percent of the sample had mostly lived with their friends over the past six months. It was not always easy or possible to discern in cases where young people in the interview sample had stayed with friends whether this was on a 'sofa-surfing' or more stable basis – or where the distinction lies between the two. It was clear, however, that young people were happier to turn to friends or stay with them than any other form of accommodation outside the parental home. When young people experienced difficulties in the family home or were thrown out, they described turning to friends (and their friends' families) for somewhere to stay. This also appeared to be the case when young people were accommodated elsewhere, such as foster care or supported housing.

Me and my dad weren't getting along. I finally started getting rebellious and sort of my dad couldn't put up with me. So my dad kinda said either listen to his rules or I leave. And I thought great I'm getting old enough, so I thought I'll step it. I just thought I'll go and do my own thing. So I... Finally I found myself homeless and I found myself at friends' houses prancing around, just doing rubbish really.

¹⁰³ One other young person who lived with his older cousin was hit by her and deprived of food.

Chapter 4 – Accessing accommodation and the provision of support

This chapter focuses on the provision of accommodation and accommodation-related support for young offenders with accommodation difficulties as perceived by stakeholders working with such young people and the young offenders themselves. It is based on two main sources of information: the focus groups/interviews carried out with key stakeholders including YOT staff in each of the ten areas¹⁰⁴ and the young people's interviews.

The purpose of the stakeholder focus group was twofold:

1. To draw out key issues of practice in each of the ten areas with regard to housing and accommodation matters related to young offenders.
2. To explore local experiences of how key organisations 'fit' and work together on this issue.

Responses from the focus groups allowed for a consideration of how adults working with young offenders with accommodation difficulties perceived the key issues. Along with the interviews with young offenders in the sample it allowed for a deeper consideration of the barriers to and problems of providing support and accommodation to young offenders with housing difficulties.

The Profile of Young People with Accommodation Difficulties

Stakeholders in seven of the ten areas stated that more males than females presented with accommodation difficulties, although comments from three areas suggested that they were seeing an increasing number of young women. However, this perception appears misleading as this study has shown that within those areas, the young women in the sample were significantly more likely to be homeless; this would suggest that young women are either not presenting for assistance or that assistance is not offered or is unsuitable. In two sites, stakeholders felt that young women who had accommodation problems took priority (rightly or wrongly) over young men because of their greater

¹⁰⁴ As discussed in the Methods section, stakeholders were identified by YOT staff in each area on the basis that they worked with or had knowledge of young people who experienced accommodation problems, for example, accommodation providers, social services, and Connexions staff. Where YOTs identified fewer than three such individuals, one to one interviews were carried out in place of focus groups. For ease of reference all stakeholder interactions will be described as 'focus groups' in this chapter.

perceived vulnerability, citing, for example, the risk that they might become involved in prostitution¹⁰⁵.

In six areas, stakeholders felt that the age at which young people were most commonly identified as having accommodation problems was 16 (one area said that they most frequently worked with young people aged 15 and over). Stakeholders described 16 as being a key age when many young people were evicted from the family home. Again this is different from the data obtained from interviews with young people and practitioners in those ten areas, which showed the peak ages of vulnerability to being thrown out of the family home to be between 13-15 years. However, stakeholders also described a sense that, on occasions, parents/carers were simply waiting for the young person's 16th birthday to evict them and this is supported by the data from the young people's interviews discussed in chapter 2.

Ethnicity was not deemed to be a factor – focus group participants did not recognise any patterns in the ethnicities of the young people with accommodation difficulties whom they saw. Analysis of the data gathered from *Asset* and the young people's interviews confirm that there was no significant difference in the ethnicity of young people who were recorded as ever having experienced a more serious or immediate housing problem.

A number of key factors influencing a young person's propensity to experience housing difficulties were mentioned during focus groups. These included a lack of family support and/or broken homes; substance use; a lack of education and anger management issues. Such factors are recognised in the wider literature as being prevalent amongst young people in housing difficulty (SEU, 1998; Foyer Federation, 2001; Home Office, 2003).

The Provision of Accommodation

Stakeholders attending the ten site focus groups were asked whether the provision of accommodation for young offenders in their local area was sufficient to cope with demand. In nine out of ten sites the general consensus was that there was insufficient accommodation for young people experiencing housing difficulties¹⁰⁶. Several groups agreed that there were few designated beds for young offenders specifically and sometimes for under 18 year olds more generally. Beyond this, the focus group discussions appeared to highlight a number of other national themes concerning the provision of accommodation for young people:

¹⁰⁵ The findings of this study suggest either that very few young offenders (male or female) with housing difficulties do become involved in prostitution, or that such involvement is well hidden. One practitioner interviewed considered that a young person in the study may be involved in prostitution but this was not verified.

¹⁰⁶ In the tenth site, some practitioners felt that there was an adequate number of 'bed spaces' for young people in the area but that these were not being properly targeted.

Levels of need

Young people seeking accommodation have varying levels of need and require different types and intensities of support. Practitioners tended to divide young people into three groups: low, mid and high level needs. Stakeholders in six of the ten sites described a shortage of accommodation for those with high levels of need, citing in particular, substance use issues or mental health needs. Practitioners in one site said that three young people with high levels of need could not currently be accommodated in the local area and had been bought sleeping bags and camping equipment and were sleeping on the beach. One young person also from this area interviewed during the course of the study had been sleeping in a tent purchased for him by social services. Practitioners in four sites specifically mentioned a paucity of detoxification or rehabilitation beds for young people and in one site stated the need for a specialist provision with beds for under 18 year olds.

Mid/Long term provision

Discussions in seven of the ten focus groups highlighted that stakeholders felt there was a shortage of mid to long term provision for young people. Most agreed that there were sufficient emergency beds in hostels or B&B (although few thought that B&B accommodation was suitable for young people) but that these could and should only be used for short periods of time. They identified, however, that semi-independent and supported accommodation was very limited and that there was insufficient move-on accommodation suitable for young people. As a result young people might end up living in 'emergency' accommodation for some time. Two sites also mentioned that finding appropriate housing for care leavers and single young people¹⁰⁷ was difficult. Nonetheless, young offenders in this study did not, as discussed, see particular forms of housing as more or less appropriate; their key concerns were cleanliness, safety, the appropriateness of rules, and maintaining contact with family and friends in order to avoid loneliness.

Private rental market

The inaccessibility of the private rental market was highlighted in group discussions in all ten sites, yet practitioners agreed that such accommodation may be the key to increasing provision for young people experiencing housing difficulties. In particular, privately rented accommodation could offer the longer term options and independent living opportunities stakeholders felt were currently lacking. A number of stakeholders thought that many private landlords would not want to house young people, and particularly young offenders because of the perceived (and often real) problems and complications they brought. Six focus group discussions raised important financial obstacles to accessing privately rented accommodation. Most practitioners felt that social services should be responsible for acting as guarantor for rent payment due to their legal responsibility for the young people but that they regularly refused to do so and YOTs and

¹⁰⁷ As opposed to young couples or families.

other helping organisations were not able to act as such. In addition, practitioners agreed that the ‘single room rent’¹⁰⁸ was far too low given the rising rental costs in most areas.

Lack of choice

Stakeholders in several areas agreed that they needed to be able to offer young people a choice of accommodation options. Practitioners in one site explained that giving young people the choice in accommodation increased the young person’s commitment to the accommodation provided. They also commented that when a young person rejected accommodation offered to them, on the basis, perhaps, that they felt it was unsuitable for them, housing services considered them to be intentionally homeless and discharged their duty to offer alternatives. The interviews with young people conducted during this study highlighted that they often felt that the accommodation they were offered was indeed unsuitable on the grounds, for example, that it was unclean or inaccessible. They also considered that it was often difficult to get adults to listen to their concerns. Thus, two individuals described how their lack of input into the type or location of the accommodation they were offered was disempowering and made them feel that they were not being listened to:

...They just keep messing me around and won't listen. I don't think they care...Because I'm in west London and you've sent me out all the way to east London. And [I'm] trying to say 'Look!...Can you move me please because I don't want to live up in east London'. [Young people] are depressed, they're emotionally messed up and they need to feel better by being around people they know. Now if people that don't really know you, like the housing, and don't really care, they're just doing their job. They can actually get people hurt...

Serious offending

In four sites, focus group participants agreed that finding accommodation for young people with convictions for ‘serious’ offences such as arson, violence, sexual offences and Schedule 1 offences (against young people under 16) was particularly difficult. Stakeholders in two sites explained that insurance policies often prohibited housing convicted arsonists. Where violent or sexual offenders were concerned accommodation providers often felt that the health and safety risks to both staff and other residents precluded offering housing – particularly where demand outstripped supply and providers could afford to be more selective. This issue has been highlighted by other research (for example, Eagle and Gammampila, forthcoming; Nacro Cymru, 2005) which identified that some organisations offering accommodation to young ex-offenders ‘cherry-pick’ according to offence type.

Whilst focus group participants recognised the risks and difficulties inherent in housing young people with particular convictions, they argued that inflexibility around this was unhelpful. Several suggested that it would be helpful if accommodation providers could look beyond the ‘label’ of certain offences and consider the length of time passed since

¹⁰⁸ Single people under 25 are only given enough housing benefit to pay for the average rent of a single room in their area. This is the case even if they live alone (Shelter website).

the offence in question, the nature of the offence and so on. This issue is of importance given that at least eight percent (n=21) of the young people in this study sample had been convicted of a Schedule 1 offence and two percent (n=4) were on the Sex Offenders Register. There is also some anecdotal evidence to suggest that Schedule 1 convictions are becoming more common as young people are convicted more frequently of offences against other young people (Arnull et al, forthcoming and discussed earlier).

Custody and accommodation

Experiencing accommodation difficulties can have an impact on what happens to an individual once they become involved in the criminal justice system. The lack of stable and suitable living arrangements may be a particularly important factor in their risk of custody at both remand and sentencing stages and their likelihood of receiving early release. The relationship between custody and more serious accommodation difficulties has been widely explored.

When a young person appears in court they are entitled to bail unless they are likely to abscond, commit an offence, interfere with witnesses or otherwise obstruct the course of justice. In determining whether the exceptions to bail apply, the court must take into account information that is available to it which will include consideration of the young person's situation and circumstances (Nacro, 2003). Those without a suitable bail address may be at added risk of having bail denied, due to greater concerns about non-appearance and vulnerability to further offending. Anecdotally, there were also suggestions that this could affect the young person being released from custody, but there was no firm evidence in this study that this was or had been the case. The relationship between the denial of bail and not having a suitable address is a difficult one, as the lack of appropriate accommodation is not a reason in itself for being remanded in custody, under the provisions of the Bail Act 1976 (amended). However it will be something that is taken into account by the court, when determining whether bail can be granted and if so, what the conditions should be. (Nacro Youth Crime Briefing March 2003a)

At the sentencing stage, the stability of living arrangements is equally important. Suitable and settled accommodation is seen as key if a community sentence is to be effective in reducing or preventing re-offending (Barklay and Collett, 2000). There is some indication that people with housing difficulties may be less likely to receive community sentences (Nacro, 1993). The Audit Commission (2004) estimated that over 800 young people every year receive custodial sentences because they are not in stable accommodation. This is supported by work by Lader et al (2000) which identified that 35 percent of sentenced young males and 42 percent of sentenced young females surveyed had been homeless in the six months prior to the custodial episode. HM Inspector of Prison's thematic review of young prisoners (1997) found that 25 percent of young prisoners had been identified as homeless or in insecure accommodation on reception.

Accommodation difficulties frequently continue on release from custody. In this study, at the point of interview, 40 percent (n=61) of the young people in the sample were in custody or secure accommodation. Of those, 67 percent (n=41) had been in custody

before, 17 percent (n=7/41) of whom had previously left custody without a place to live. 26 percent (n=16) of young people interviewed in custody said they did not have a place to live arranged for their release. Despite this, only two young people thought that they would definitely be homeless on release; nine young people believed they would not be homeless on release and five did not know. The SEU (2002) identified that one third of prisoners lose their accommodation on imprisonment and that one third have nowhere to stay on release.

Of the 72 percent (n=44) of young people in this study who knew where they would be living on release, 73 percent (n=32) were returning to the same place they lived before going into custody. The majority of young people believed they would live at a parent's house on release as demonstrated in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 – Place young people interviewed in custody believed they would live on release (n=44)

Accommodation type	% (n)
Parents	61 (27)
Other family member	5 (2)
Foster parents	5 (2)
Children's Home	7 (3)
Hostel	2 (1)
Own residence (supported)	5 (2)
Own residence (unsupported)	9 (4)
Other	7 (3)

Other studies have supported our findings and suggested that the majority of young people who lived with parents prior to custody return to live with them on release (Hazel et al, 2002; Nacro Cymru, 2006). Also, Home Office research (2005) indicated that young people who received visits from their partner or family whilst in custody were more likely to have accommodation arranged for them on release than those who did not. Nacro (2006) found that 34 percent of young people came out of custody to a different address to the one they were living in prior to custody. If they did not return to live with parents, young people were most likely to live with a member of the extended family (31 percent), a non-family member or to live independently (24 and 25 percent respectively). Those young people not living with a family member prior to custody were also more likely to be homeless on release.

Focus group discussions with key stakeholders highlighted other issues around the relationship between accommodation problems and custody. Discussions in four sites centred on the impact of unstable or unsuitable accommodation arrangements on early release.

When this research was undertaken, the majority of young people aged under 18 given a custodial sentence receive a Detention and Training Order (DTO). In May 2002, electronic monitoring was made available to facilitate the early release of young people

on DTOs. There is an expectation in favour of early release (Nacro, 2003). Electronic monitoring requires the installation of monitoring equipment at the address the young person is being released to. As a result, to be eligible for release under these arrangements, the young person needs a viable and settled address to go to and the agreement of the housing provider (whoever that may be) to the electronic monitoring equipment being installed.

Stakeholders reported that most private landlords and B&B owners would not agree to the installation of monitoring equipment. In one site, focus group participants highlighted that spot checks on the young person and the installation and maintenance of the equipment could take place at unsociable hours that discouraged landlords from agreeing. Additionally, these practitioners explained that some landlords and housing providers felt that both Intensive Supervision and Support Programmes (ISSP) and electronic monitoring placed unreasonable burdens of supervision on them.

Practitioners in three sites also discussed a tension between YJB/Home Office early release plans and the prioritising of the accommodation needs of custody leavers and housing providers' commitments under Supporting People. Providers with Supporting People funding have obligations to maintain high occupancy rates. Accordingly they are not keen to hold bed spaces empty until a young person is released from custody when the space could be taken by a young person in immediate need. Empty beds cost housing providers money and holding spaces is a gamble particularly when the young person may or may not be given early release. Linked to this, one site argued that housing benefits or Job Seeker's Allowance should be payable in advance of release from custody to secure adequate accommodation before or immediately on release.

The Homelessness Act 2002 places a duty on local authorities to give greater priority to those leaving institutional settings when allocating housing and one of the aims of the Housing Act 2002 was to prevent local authorities from having blanket bans or policies to exclude certain groups of people from social housing because of their offending behaviour. The Code of Guidance that accompanies the Act indicates that the local authority should consider, amongst other things, the length of time spent in custody, whether the individual will be under supervision from the probation service or YOT and whether on release from custody they have been able to obtain and maintain accommodation.

Nonetheless, an additional issue mentioned in two focus groups was that some local authority housing services and other providers will not recognise a young person as homeless until they present themselves as such on the day they are released from prison.

Support and Suitability

Both the stakeholders attending the focus groups and the young people interviewed were clear about what made accommodation suitable or unsuitable (also discussed in chapter

3) and which agencies and individuals did or did not offer support to young people with accommodation problems.

The focus group discussions raised some key issues around how young people with accommodation difficulties were not being supported by the working practices of housing providers and helping organisations within their areas¹⁰⁹. In seven focus groups, stakeholders felt that the interpretation of 'intentional homelessness'¹¹⁰ by such organisations caused significant problems for young people seeking accommodation support, this might for example be the local authority housing office. Practitioners explained that young people who did not abide by the rules of the accommodation in which they were placed and were evicted as a result were sometimes deemed to have made themselves intentionally homeless.

Shelter (2005) identified that authorities have broad interpretations of intentional homelessness in relation to young people. For example, not following parents' rules, being violent towards parents, having rent arrears or being repeatedly evicted from temporary accommodation. Additionally, some local authorities will assess young people who have offended as making themselves intentionally homeless particularly where the offending results in a custodial sentence (Nacro YCS Briefing, December 2005). The difficulties identified in this area by this study indicate that this is an area with which YOT accommodation officers might usefully engage, for example in providing advocacy and support.

Practitioners in two sites argued that young people often needed a considerable amount of time to settle into accommodation and 'get to grips' with the rules. Chapter 3 highlighted that despite being generally accepting of the need for rules, young people often did not understand the rules set by their accommodation providers or did not understand why they were important (and so did not agree with them). Thus it would appear realistic to allow a certain period of 'grace'. Additionally, stakeholders in five of the ten sites agreed that young people needed to be given more than one chance in accommodation and that this frequently did not happen. One 17 year old interviewee agreed, saying that: "*Once you've messed up with the council once, you've messed up with them for good*" when asked who had told him that, he replied that the council had.

Interviews with the young people and the stakeholders' focus groups highlighted that the working practices or requirements of some housing providers and helping organisations were inappropriate when dealing with young people and were actively unhelpful in some

¹⁰⁹ It should be remembered that the stakeholders were all local providers or practitioners working with young offenders with housing difficulties within the ten sampled areas.

¹¹⁰ Intentional homelessness means the individual is considered to have been responsible for losing their last settled accommodation by having deliberately done or not done something. A finding of intentional homelessness effectively works to discharge the local authority's responsibility to find an individual alternative accommodation. This means the individual may lose their right to housing assistance or support or be owed a temporary rather than full duty under housing legislation. In this case they might receive advice and information about housing but not accommodation itself.

cases. For example, several practitioners agreed that young people were often given appointments first thing in the morning which they would not make, or on attending appointments were told to come back later – which they would forget or decide not to do. There was a sense that such practices were setting the young people up to fail. Two young people in the study stated that they had been required to attend a day centre for independent living in one case and the Job Centre in the other as a requirement of receiving housing help from the local authority; neither understood why.

Practitioners in three sites stated that local authority housing services in their areas insisted that young people had a letter from their parent or carer confirming that they had been evicted. This was deemed to be difficult for the young person to achieve in most cases, and impossible in some. One young person interviewed was clearly frustrated and confused by this requirement and explained that his mother, although she had evicted him from the family home, refused to write such a letter.

A practitioner in one site commented that social services in his area required not only such a letter but also that the young person had proof of their identification by way of either a birth certificate or passport.¹¹¹ Once again, he explained that many young people experiencing severe accommodation difficulties have neither:

They also have to have, and this is often a sticking point, proof of ID. If your parents are chucking you out of the house and they're throwing your prized possessions on the lawn, the last thing you're going to be thinking of is picking up your passport...or you might not even have one... You wouldn't believe the number of kids that don't even have birth certificates. Particularly kids that have been [in care]. They've been in care for a length of time. They'll have to go and get one. And that's a strange situation.

The young people interviewed were clearly confused by the requirements and rules of the local authority and other helping organisations – particularly as they felt they were approaching them at a time of dire need:

R: They kept on saying I had to be in some area code or something.

I: Oh right, so you were in the wrong post code?

R: Mm. But obviously I'd been chucked out and I've got nowhere to go. And I'm living with my friend. Obviously I'm gonna have that area code, innit? 'Cos I've got nowhere to go. It's a really stupid thing, innit?

I: And who was that, the local housing department?

R: Yeah.

Some of these issues are linked with the level and nature of more general support young people with housing difficulties require and their dependence on adults to help them negotiate their way to accommodation – this is discussed in more detail below.

¹¹¹ Local authority housing departments require basic information about individuals making housing applications; proof of age with reference to priority need status may have been an issue in this instance.

As stated above, the young people interviews and the stakeholder focus groups provided interesting information on which individuals and organisations were considered to offer positive help and support to young people with accommodation difficulties and which were considered to be generally unhelpful. The general consensus from the stakeholder focus groups was that young people were not receiving sufficient support from anybody in relation to their accommodation problems. The role of an advocate or supporter could, therefore be helpful. It would enable the young offenders to understand the housing legislation, the requirements which they are expected to fulfil, the rules and reasons for those rules. This role of advocate may be one which can be fulfilled by the accommodation officer within the YOT, or another practitioner; such as a floating support worker and is a role which it would seem important for someone to fulfil.

Receiving Help

Of the 54 young people who undertook the more detailed semi-structured interview most could identify an individual or organisation that had helped them with their accommodation. The young people's interviews were analysed according to their feelings about their YOT worker or YOT staff more generally, social services, the local council and other helping organisations, often particular to each area.

YOTs

Of the 54 young people who undertook the semi-structured interview, 26 talked about how YOT staff had helped with their accommodation problems. Just three young people said that the YOT had not helped them. In general, however, young people appeared to feel that YOT staff offered them more than a basic level of assistance. Examples of this included making repeated phone calls on the young person's behalf, making applications in court on their behalf and liaising with social services. One young person said that they had been supported by both the YOT and social services since they were nine years old and that they "*just lean on them*".

The following young person illustrated how YOT workers can play an important role in pro-social modelling – and how aware young people may be about issues such as reliability:

Because my dad, he isn't very reliable for taking you places. He'll say 'yeah I'll take you to that' and then he'll ring you 'oh sorry, I'm somewhere else'. I mean it's not his fault but [YOT worker] is always there. If I have to go somewhere [YOT worker] will take me. [YOT worker] helps me out with all my interviews and stuff. I've got to write a CV for something she'll help me with that so... And [other YOT worker] just pushed like. I was supposed to go onto a drama course, but the lady didn't get me on so [other YOT worker] kept ringing them and ringing them and ringing them and ringing them. He's good. I like him best.

The interviewed young people's reports of the frequency and level of support they received from YOT workers were also positive, with a number stating that they saw their YOT worker once or twice a week. This may be explained, in part, by the conditions of their orders¹¹². However, there were other indications of the young people's reliance on YOT staff including having, and using, their YOT worker's mobile number (discussed below). Interviewees also reported that YOT staff acted quickly and offered help with their accommodation difficulties straight away or within a few days.

YOTs and Partnership Working

Stakeholders in nine of the ten areas felt that working relations between the YOT and accommodation related services were good, with several stating that relations had improved, and continued to do so, over the last few years. In five sites, practitioners mentioned specific forums, partnerships or groups in the area which considered young people's accommodation problems. These groups tended to meet between once a month and once a quarter. The stakeholder interviewed in one site described having established protocols with the YOT. In two areas, stakeholders felt that information sharing between agencies needed to improve and protocols needed to be put in place.

In the review of youth justice plans every YOT recognised that developing constructive relations with relevant partners was an essential part of any strategy to ensure that all young people were in suitable accommodation. All referred to the Supporting People agenda and the large majority to the local Homeless Person's team as being key in the development of their local provision. It was not always apparent, however, to what extent such links translated into concrete provision. Many of the action plans appeared to rely to some extent on improving or developing links with a wide range of service providers, including:

-
- Registered social landlords
- Private sector providers
- YMCA
- Foyers
- Resettlement and Aftercare Provision (RAP)
- RESET
- Connexions.

¹¹² Also the necessity for YOT workers to meet the contact requirements specified in the *National Standards for Youth Justice 2004*.

Again it was frequently unclear how effective these relationships had been in increasing the stock of accommodation available to young people. However, information has been examined from other sources to provide a better picture, particularly in terms of the relationships YOTs have with social services, local authority housing/homelessness departments and integrating into planning processes for Supporting People and local authority homelessness strategies.

A significant proportion of YOTs in youth justice plans noted that responding effectively to those young people at risk of homelessness relied heavily on gaining access to accommodation through the local Children's Services department, as they effectively 'gate-keep' access to services. It was clear, however, that in many areas accessing the relevant resources was not without its problems.

Other issues noted in the youth justice plans tended to cluster around a small number of interrelated themes.

- A relative shortage of appropriate residential / foster provision within the local authority, leading to pressure to place outside the local area.
- A high threshold for the provision of services that could exclude many young people known to the YOT.
- A tendency to deny responsibility for provision of accommodation, particularly in relation to older children.
- A tendency to close cases where young people entered custody.

Social services

Seventy one percent (n=108) of young people identified as having accommodation difficulties and interviewed in this study said they had had a social worker at some point in their lives. Analysis indicates that those in the sample who have ever had a social worker were no more or less likely to have ever been homeless or to have sought formal housing provision and / or support than those who said they had never had a social worker. One might have expected that having a social worker would have been positively correlated on the basis that social workers are frequently allocated to families experiencing one or some of the range of risk factors also linked with accommodation problems. Alternatively, one might have expected that not having had a social worker was positively correlated with an increased risk of long-term housing need, on the basis that social services' intervention could or should prevent some of those risk factors from becoming so serious as to result in an acute housing difficulty at a later point. The fact that the relationship between the two appears to be neutral is interesting.

In the semi-structured interviews undertaken only one young person of 26 who commented said that the support they had received from social services had been good. Seven young people specifically stated that social services had not been helpful and the majority gave examples of poor practice, with one young person stating, for example:

R: Once I got kicked out on a Sunday so I had to ring emergency services and they told me to stay at a mate's house. But that was it.

I: That was it?

R: Just told me to stay at a mate's house, they didn't bother doing anything.

I: And if you hadn't had a mate you could stay with?

R: I didn't, I had to get [friend] up and we had to stay on the street for a night.

One of the most commonly occurring themes was the lack of communication between social services and the young people – including those who knew they had an allocated social worker. A number of young people interviewed appeared to be very much 'in the dark' about what social services were doing to identify accommodation for them or where they might be placed next. Despite this, many young people continued to have faith that social services would find them somewhere to live:

I: Do you know if anyone's trying to find you somewhere to live?

R: Well yeah, social services are.

I: Right. Do you know what they're trying to do?

R: No.

I: They don't talk to you about what you'd like or...

R: No.

I: Do you feel quite confident that they will find you somewhere?

R: Yeah.

The 'problem' with this is that it would seem to foster a dependent attitude, which assumed that a solution would 'magically' appear when required; it did not actively engage the young person in the process and its complexities or empower them to try and assist with solutions.

Of the young people in the sample who said that they had an allocated social worker, few had their contact details or knew how to contact them in an emergency. More young people appeared to have the personal mobile number of their YOT officer than their allocated social worker and when asked what they would do if they needed to contact social services out of hours, most either did not know or said they would contact their YOT officer instead. Most said they would rely on their current housing provider to contact social services for them. Alongside this, at least two young women said they received visits from their social worker very infrequently or never, one said "*they stopped seeing me when I was 17. They just stopped coming round*", in the other case, the young woman was questioned:

I: How often do you see [your social worker]?

R: When I was in my last secure unit I saw her once. She signed an agreement to see me every two weeks. In three months I saw her once.

I: What about when you were just living in the residential unit?

R: No, I've never seen her when I'm in care, ever... The only time I see her is when I'm in court and she's sitting there on the chairs.

Nine young people commented on the frequency with which they saw their social worker. Only three of those said that they saw them once or twice a month, the other six said they received visits “*sometimes*”, “*not very often*” or “*whenever they [social services] feel like it*”.

This fits well with the experiences of stakeholders who attended the focus groups. A representative from social services attended the focus group or was interviewed in four of the ten areas¹¹³. Some stakeholders present commented that social services were noticeable by their absence – as key stakeholders dealing with young people with accommodation problems other practitioners noted, but were not surprised by, their non-attendance. In two sites, stakeholders commented that social services were reluctant to provide support to young people aged 15 who experienced accommodation difficulties and in another two sites, stakeholders felt that social services were reluctant to get involved where the young person was aged 16 or 17. The absence of social services’ intervention with young offenders has been noted in other research (Arnall et al, 2005). However given the prevalence of ‘in care’ experiences, contact with social services and level of victimisation and abuse in this sample of young people such an absence must be of some concern.

Local authority housing/homelessness departments

Young people’s thoughts about the help and support they had received from the local authority housing and homelessness departments were more mixed with examples of both good and bad practice. The young people in this study tended to feel less well supported or helped by the local authority when they felt they had been placed in unsuitable accommodation by them. One young person had been found B&B accommodation by the local authority but discovered it was inaccessible by public transport:

Like they tried to send me to [place] for the weekend. Like send me to a bed and breakfast. They gave me train tickets but then I found out from one of my mates, he lives in [place] that it’s like 12 miles roughly from the train station. So I was a bit screwed there. So I stayed at my mate’s for a bit. Like after the weekend we went in there and had a look. And we couldn’t get there like... We were swearing at them and like, that day they sorted something out at the YMCA.

Some young people described presenting themselves to the local authority as homeless or in housing need and were clearly aware of the local authority responsibility for providing housing. Practitioners in two sites suggested that there was an assumption that the council would provide accommodation to those in need and that some families ‘evicted’ their children at 16 in order that the young person could jump the queue for council accommodation.

¹¹³ A social services representative was invited to participate in focus groups/interviews in all sites.

One young person, however, described her contact at the local authority as “*lively and the kind of person you want around you when you’re feeling low*”, praising his professionalism and also his positivism. Such good experiences clearly leave an impression with the young people.

There is additional evidence to suggest that young people find the experience of contacting local authority housing departments daunting and difficult. Shelter (2005) found that young people’s knowledge and understanding of housing legislation and priority need was lacking, for example not understanding that pregnancy could confer priority need. Indications from this study are that being pregnant and aged under 18 did not always result in a better outcome for the young person with some young mothers describing unsuitable accommodation and a lack of control over their futures.

Additionally, the Audit Commission (2004) made the recommendation that housing authorities should be part of the YOT steering group so that suitable accommodation can be jointly planned. The Nacro Cymru (2005) research recommended that housing authorities should identify an officer to be responsible for young people or be seconded to the YOT if the demand for services can be justified. Shelter (2005) identified in a survey of English authorities that 82 percent (n=134) had developed services specifically to assist homeless young people aged 16 to 24 years and that a similar percentage had revised their procedures for joint working for this age group with social services.

Other

A small number of young people in the study identified other organisations or individuals as having helped them with their accommodation. Four were very positive about the help they had received from Connexions staff noting in particular that they responded to young people’s queries quickly and that it was easy to get an appointment. The following quote demonstrates especially good practice:

When I first came here I didn’t know where everything is and that. And like I was asking for directions to places and they were telling me street names that I didn’t know. So I remember one woman, she’d just started working [at Connexions] and she, like, walked me all around [place]. Like all around town and showed me where everything is and stuff. She helped me sort out my housing. Any forms that I’ve ever had to fill out I’ve got them from Connexions. Like, cos I’ve not known where to get them and that. They’ve sorted it all out for me. They’ve given me loads of references for all sorts, colleges, housing and everything.

In England, Connexions partnerships exist that cover young people aged 13 to 19 years of age.¹¹⁴ Work with Connexions is a requirement of YJB core funding for YOTs in England and means that there will be a worker located in the YOT whose role it is to act as a broker for necessary services, which may include accommodation (YJB Advice Note 5).

¹¹⁴ Wales has a different arrangement called ‘Extending Entitlement’.

Whilst their primary role is in relation to education, training and employment, the role of the personal adviser may extend into helping young people with other aspects of their life. Responsibility for housing is not a specific remit, but supporting the young person with access to benefits would also be helpful in this respect (DfES 2001).

Young people in the sample were largely positive about the help and support they received from other organisations – many of which appeared to be small, local youth-focused projects. Their remits ranged from locating accommodation for the young people to accompanying them to appointments or making phone calls on their behalf. Some provided more basic support such as offering food, showers or laundry facilities to young people presenting with acute accommodation problems.

The young people interviewed did not, however, talk about support and help from hostels, and did not understand the difference between ‘supported’ and ‘unsupported’ accommodation. This is important because some of the providers were the same ones as those surveyed and those that may have taken part in the focus groups in the ten areas, most of whom described the support services they provided. As discussed earlier, this discrepancy would suggest that young people are either not receiving significant support from hostels, or it is not of a type or nature that they recognise or value. This is worthy of further consideration from a policy and practice perspective.

No one helped

Ten young offenders who undertook the semi-structured interview said that no one had helped them with their accommodation problems. Three young people initially said they had received no help but later identified an individual or organisation that had offered assistance. It is possible, of course, that some of the ten interviewees had received help or support but it is important that they did not remember this or did not feel that they had been helped. One young person did not think they had been helped but could not think of any help they had needed; another interviewee aged 16 (who had been accommodated from an early age and was currently living in a residential unit) clearly felt that social services’ support was her ‘right’ and did not, therefore, view it as help:

I: Do you think you’ve ever been helped by a service? Has anyone ever given you help finding somewhere to live or with your housing situation?

R: No, I don’t need it yet ‘cos I’m only 16. And I don’t need anybody to find me it, or find me a placement of my own.

Some of the young people’s descriptions of not being helped emphasised that they are children still in need of adult support. One young person explained that no one had helped despite what he considered to be obvious signs of abuse during his childhood: “*I was going into school with one side of my face purple*”. Another said that no one had helped him get back to school for four years¹¹⁵. One interviewee said that he felt ashamed

¹¹⁵ 91 percent (n=138) of the interviewed sample had been either temporarily or permanently excluded from school at least once in their lives.

to ask for help even though he was clearly confused by the requirements of the Local Authority (to get an 'eviction letter' from his mother). Additionally, the way in which rules are interpreted or applied can seem confusing or 'hurtful' to a young person. The following extract demonstrates how alone some of the young people feel (and how let down by social services), seemingly forced into early independence¹¹⁶:

R: But I went down to social services the other day, and I said 'Look, I think I need a bit of support'. Just so I can talk to someone. The more people I've got to talk to the better really. But, 'cos social services had...they've closed my case, my file, everything. So I feel like I'm on my own. I only want social services...

I: Is that because you're 18 now do you think?

R: Yeah. No, I think it's because...I don't know. But I feel like I want support. I've asked them to help me with my psychologist and everything. But they've closed the case because I don't think they want to spend money to help me...They've never helped me in my life. For the last six years of working with them, they've...they haven't provided me...I mean they've been the worst people ever to have in my life.

This last quote demonstrates the vulnerability and powerlessness of some of the young people in this study.

The Need for General Support

Both the practitioner focus groups and the interviews with the young people indicated that many experiencing accommodation difficulties need a broad level of support. Essentially, many of the young people did not have or did not feel they had an adult to rely on and discussions about the complexity of claiming benefits or accessing accommodation made it clear how vital the role of the adult advocate can be. Stakeholders in three sites explained that there was a shortage of floating support for young people and described how such support could fill the gap left by absent parents or carers. The young people highlighted that support with cooking, cleaning and budgeting would also be helpful.

The interviews with young people suggested that a number felt confused by the requirements of helping organisations and the issue of literacy was raised by stakeholders. Research indicates that education is a particular issue for young offenders and so completing complex applications and forms can be daunting¹¹⁷ (Arnall et al, 2005). A homeless interviewee demonstrated the fear some young people felt – of not knowing or understanding how processes worked – and how helpless that left them:

¹¹⁶ This young person had just turned 18 years.

¹¹⁷ Again it is important to recall that most of the sample had been excluded from school at some point in their life and thus it may be that issues of literacy are significant amongst this group. This would make form-filling and other application processes particularly difficult or stressful.

I: You know, never having been homeless myself, if I was in a tent I'd be there, you know, before they opened sitting on their doorstep. That's one of the things we want to understand really. What is it, if you're homeless, would stop you from going [to get help] and what would help you to go?

R: Support.

I: So it would be support...Is it because it's a bit scary to go?

R: Cos I don't know what to do or say.

Later, the same young person explained:

R: I got told to go back to the Job Centre and try and sign on for JSA¹¹⁸. But I've been there six times and I've been told every single time that I'm not entitled to it and just no one will listen to me.

I: Right. Why do they say you're not entitled?

R: They just say I've got DLAs¹¹⁹ coming in which is more than what they give.

I: Right. So why do other people think you should get it?

R: I don't know. I don't know the rules about these things anymore. I used to. I don't anymore.

I: So it's all a bit complicated is it?

R: Yeah.

This fear and helplessness sometimes manifested itself in anger, largely because of their frustration with the situation:

In the housing, like, I went to get...Like I went there last week three times...I had a form. They told me to bring in a form. I brang in my whole form and I had to...but I left out one thing and they told me once I had done that I could bring it back. That's the only thing I had to bring. So I brought the only think I had to bring and told me...to the next day, to a next man. Next man told me 'You have to bring in the other two'. They said 'You have to bring in another sheet'. I said okay, I was vexed but I said alright. I went and came back with the other sheet. They told me I had to bring something else. So I just said 'You know what, fuck it, I'm not bringing it, yeah? I'm not bringing it in. If you want it, come and get it. I aint bringing it in. You lot are taking the fucking piss. Every day I turn up, I come in here, every time it's something new. Do you think I'm coming here for a laugh?' Now when I go in there I don't talk to them, I just give them the thing and go.

Such frustration is often interpreted by helping organisations as aggression or difficult behaviour which can lead to the withdrawing of assistance.

The importance of the role of the adult advocate or negotiator has been highlighted in other research with young offenders (Eagle and Gammampila, forthcoming; Rees and Wallace 1982). The young people interviewed as part of this study demonstrated that they

¹¹⁸ Job Seeker's Allowance.

¹¹⁹ Disability Living Allowance which was believed to relate to this young person's ADHD.

were very much dependent on adults to organise their accommodation for them; few displayed the self-motivation to improve their housing situation themselves, no matter how dire their current situation appeared to be. Again this may not be surprising given the levels of victimisation in this sample as well the high levels of school exclusion. At the least, both would be likely to affect confidence and literacy, which are key skills in such situations.

Despite the general consensus of both young people and stakeholders that insufficient help and support was on offer to young people with housing difficulties, many young people thought that they would have been worse off if they had not received whatever help they had. Four thought they would be homeless without it, two thought they would be in prison and two said they would be dead. Only one interviewee thought their situation would have been better had they not been 'helped' and that was because he "*wouldn't have to waste time at the YOT*". Some were unclear about how help had changed their situation concluding that they would have been about the same whether or not they had received the help.

Chapter 5: Housing provider study

This section is based on information provided by the main housing providers for each of the ten areas. The providers were identified by the YOTs as the services they referred young people to in their areas and so many of the young people interviewed had first hand experience of their services; the sample list of 56 was drawn from this. In total 56 questionnaires were requested from housing providers and 39 (70 percent) were returned. Following initial analysis the sample was reduced to 30 (54 percent of what was requested)¹²⁰. A number were excluded as they were not considered specific enough about the information they provided about young people.

Home Office research (2003) indicates that the majority of homeless young people have used both general hostels or hostels specifically for young people at some point and indicates that in a study of 160 young people, 74 percent had been in a hostel at some time and 41 percent in the preceding month. 86 percent of young people were also aware that this was a service they could use and 78 percent would do so in the future if need be. The then ODPM indicated that 9,230 individuals (or nine percent) of those in temporary accommodation were in hostels as at December 2005. Hostels are therefore a significant resource in terms of providing someone a place to live on a temporary basis when they have nowhere else to go.

Nature of Provision

Of the 30 housing providers who returned questionnaires the majority were hostels. In terms of other accommodation, two providers described themselves as temporary accommodation, one as move-on accommodation and the other as local authority residential accommodation.

The accommodation in total provided 168 beds, averaging 21 per premises. The smallest had five beds (move-on accommodation), although a number of hostels were small, having six or seven beds. The largest provider had 63 beds (YMCA). The age ranges they dealt with covered:

Fig 4.2 Age ranges covered by housing providers surveyed

12 to 16	16 to 18	16 to 19/20	16 to 21	16 to 24	16 to 25	16 to upper age limit	16 to open ended
2	2	2	4	4	9	5	2

The accommodation that dealt with the youngest children was local authority accommodation (residential and move-on) and those aged 12 to 16 years of age placed here would clearly be owed a duty under the Children Act 1989. One third of providers accommodated those in the 16 to 25 age bracket, which also fits in with the housing benefit structure. The Home Office (2003) observe that ‘youth homelessness’ also tends to relate to young people of this age group, which may be a cut off point for funding and relevant to the way that services are organised.

¹²⁰ Please see methods chapter in the Appendix for details.

Of the others, the upper age limits of three providers were 28, 30, 35 and two were 65 (these included a foyer, other hostels and supported housing). Of the two that were open ended, both were supported housing.

In terms of the type of accommodation, there were four single sex hostels for women and one for men. This indicates that 83 percent (n=25) were mixed sex accommodation. Apart from that the main criteria was that the applicant was single (specified by 25 of the providers) although one of the single sex female hostels indicated it would accept lesbian couples. Most hostels were broad ranging in who they provided accommodation for with ex-offenders and substance users generally being accepted, although not necessarily specifically targeted. Home Office research (2003) found that young people sometimes viewed admissions criteria as restrictive, for example if it imposed age limits, if it was single sex accommodation or if it excluded couples or pets. The research also found that a number of drug users felt that their drug use prevented them from accessing accommodation, mainly because they were asked to address it prior to being accepted. This was not the case for alcohol users.

Referrals

Referrals of young people to housing provision largely came from local authority housing departments (27 providers) and social services (25 providers). The YOT could refer directly to 25 of the providers, as could voluntary organisations (21 providers). Young people could also self refer to 16 of the providers (53 percent). The extent to which young people are equipped with the skills or knowledge to do this is somewhat questionable, however. This is discussed earlier in this chapter and is supported by Home Office (2003) research which identified that the youngest and newly homeless were most likely to be unaware of what services and accommodation might be available. Shame, embarrassment and feeling stigmatised may also prevent young people from seeking the help they need.

Other sources of referrals included Connexions¹²¹, other housing agencies, agencies from within the local area, the asylum team (in one instance) and two hostels indicated that anyone could refer to them.

Criteria

Providers were asked what the main criteria for referral must be. The majority (87 percent) indicated the young person must be in need of support, closely followed by being homeless (83 percent) and threatened with homelessness (70 percent). These two factors are closely associated with meeting the criteria for accommodation under housing legislation, in that there must be a housing need.

Placement Decisions

In terms of how quickly a referral would lead to being placed in accommodation, 60 percent of providers (n=18) indicated the young person would in all probability go onto a waiting list, although a number qualified this by saying this would depend on the situation on the day, if there was a vacancy and whether the applicant was suitable.

¹²¹ This applied to England only.

A number qualified this further by indicating that there was a process that needed to be gone through prior to acceptance, that could involve a visit to the premises, an interview (informal, formal or both), consideration by an allocations panel and then waiting for a vacancy to arise, if found to be suitable and in need. This does not suggest an immediate process and in a number of instances it was indicated the young person might live elsewhere first, for example in B&B accommodation.

Providers were asked about their levels of occupancy, which may be a determinant of how quickly a young person can be placed. 50 percent (n=15) of providers indicated that their premises were always full and 37 percent (n=11) that they were always over 75 percent full. This latter measure may not give a true picture of the true level of occupancy as a number of providers indicated they were anything from 90 percent to 99 percent full all of the time.

Assessment (General)

Housing providers were asked whether they assessed young people on referral and prior to acceptance for a place; 27 indicated they did (90 percent). Of those that did not, one was local authority residential provision (which provided accommodation to 12 to 16 year olds) and the other two possibly had lower thresholds for assessment into their accommodation (supported housing and YMCA).

Providers were asked how soon after the referral an assessment would take place. Fourteen providers indicated that it was likely to be within a week, but a number of these qualified it by saying it could be less. Seven indicated it could be on the same day, five that it could be within two or three days and three that it would be within a month.

Housing providers were asked to indicate what they assessed, when considering someone for a placement. Almost without exception, they indicated that they would look at the risks a young person might present to staff and other residents. Additionally they would look at what risk might be presented to the young person and would consider the level of support and assistance the young person needed to successfully live on the premises and make a suitable resident. One provider responded that someone with a history of violence and with high support needs may not be considered suitable.

Sixteen providers indicated they would also assess other factors that included any risk that might be presented to the community, whether the building might be at risk and other personal factors such as substance use and mental health difficulties.

Providers were asked if they allowed the young person to visit the premises to see where they were going to be living prior to placement. 25 reported that they did, in a number of instances initial interviews with the provider, either formal or informal, would take place on their premises. Those that did not appear to do this as a matter of routine indicated they would if the young person requested it and had done so in the past.

The Home Office (2003) research commented that that young people saw dirty and ill equipped premises as a barrier to them considering or accessing temporary accommodation, clearly indicating that the assessment of whether to take up a place or not is a two way process. This is supported by the findings from the young people

interviews in this research and is discussed in chapter 3. Conversely local authorities are more likely to view premises as acceptable (Shelter 2005).

Criminal Justice Issues

All housing providers asked whether a young person is an ex-offender and if there was an offending history all wanted to know what types of offences the young person had committed. Providers were also asked whether there were any offence types they considered unacceptable. The ones that occurred with the most frequency were:

- Arson and causing damage by fire as it could be a problem from an insurance point of view¹²².
- Schedule 1¹²³ and sex offences because of the potential risk to other residents and the fact that residents under the age of 18 may be living on the premises¹²⁴.
- Violence and violent behaviour, for example GBH or ABH.¹²⁵

In a number of instances providers qualified their responses by saying they would take into account the circumstances in which the offending had occurred and that with arson for example it may not mean automatic rejection, if the incident had occurred a long time previously, when the young person was much younger, suggesting that a recent offence is always likely to be problematic. This issue was discussed in some length by stakeholders from the ten sites (in chapter 4) who agreed that flexibility and a 'case by case' approach by housing providers was vital.

Nacro Cymru's (2005) survey of YOTs in Wales found that young people whose behaviour was risky to others, notably arsonists and those who had committed sexual (including Schedule 1) and violent offences were some of the hardest young people to find accommodation for and this always presented a problem in what to disclose to prospective landlords.

Providers were also asked whether they would consider taking a young person who is electronically tagged, which could be relevant to anyone subject to these arrangements as part of a community supervision programme such as ISSP or on early release arrangements from custody. 20 providers indicated that they would consider it as part of the overall assessment. Of the six that did not, one indicated it could be a possibility (but had possibly not previously arisen), two others indicated it was not practicable and three stated a blanket no. The willingness of providers to accept such arrangements may also be influenced by their knowledge and understanding of what is required. The findings from the focus groups carried out during the study support this and are discussed earlier in this chapter.

¹²² Of this sample 5.4 percent had their most recent conviction for criminal damage including arson.

¹²³ See glossary.

¹²⁴ Of this sample, eight percent were convicted of Schedule 1 offences and two percent of sexual offences.

¹²⁵ It is important, therefore, to remember that 17.5 percent of our sample had their most recent conviction for violent offences and a number of young people described taking part in or being the victim of violence at or around temporary accommodation.

Providers were also asked if they would accept a young person subject to an ASBO. Twenty seven providers indicated that they would, two (seven percent) stated it might be a possibility and one (three percent) that it would not. One provider expressed concerns about accepting a young person in any arrangement that might affect the reputation of the organisation and this could preclude someone who was 'known' for anti social behaviour¹²⁶.

Licence Agreements

Ninety three percent (n=28) of housing providers require a young person to sign a licence agreement.¹²⁷ The two that do not provide accommodation for those aged 12 to 16 years of age, where this would not be an appropriate requirement given they are in the care of the local authority under Children Act 1989 provisions.

Where young people have to sign licence agreements payment of rent, being willing to accept support, not acting aggressively and not taking illegal substances on the premises appeared in almost all cases. 20 percent of licence agreements included a clause about time spent away from the premises; one provider specified the young person could spend up to three nights away from the accommodation, before it would be considered the bed space had been abandoned. Engaging or being willing to engage with education, employment or training appeared in 54 percent of agreements (n=15) and noticeably this did not just relate to foyers but other forms of provision as well. 11 providers also included a curfew in their tenancy agreements.

Going Out and Being Visited

Providers were asked what access residents have to the premises in the day time, 93 percent (n=28) responded that young people were able to stay in the accommodation in the day time and did not have to go elsewhere. Two providers did not answer this question.

The young people interviewed for this study highlighted that being able to receive visitors in their accommodation was very important. Rules prohibiting visitors were the least popular of those mentioned (see chapter 3 for the full discussion). Providers were asked whether people could have visitors in the day, 23 responded that they could. Some required prior notification of this, others did not. Providers were also asked whether residents were allowed visitors at night, 15 indicated that they were. This appeared to mean that visitors were not allowed to stay overnight but could visit until a designated time in the evening, for example, one provider indicated that visitors were allowed into the building between 8.00 am and 12.00 midnight and another that all visitors have to leave by 11.00 pm. Another indicated that visitors were allowed three evenings out of seven. Clearly this is important for young people in terms of keeping in touch with friends and family¹²⁸.

¹²⁶ However it is important to recall that in this sample there was an inverse relationship between being subject to an ASBO and experiencing acute accommodation difficulties.

¹²⁷ This is distinct from a tenancy agreement.

¹²⁸ In cases where the housing provider was a refuge, restrictions on visitors were for obvious health and safety reasons.

Facilities

Providers were also asked about what type of accommodation young people were living in and if there were any facilities available on the premises. In the majority of cases (n=23) the accommodation provided the resident with their own room and shared communal facilities such as a kitchen, bathroom and living room, six providers supplied a self-contained flat or bedsit that also had communal facilities and five providers had fully self-contained facilities.

All but two providers (93 percent) gave the young person a key to their own room or accommodation. In terms of the other facilities that were most commonly provided furniture and laundry facilities were available on all premises. Bed linen was provided in 80 percent (n=20) of instances and breakfast in 50 percent (n=15) of accommodation. One provider indicated that they had a weekly house meal.

25 providers offered some form of activity that could include a television in a communal lounge, snooker or gym and leisure facilities and 23 had IT facilities. One provider also offered a quiet room for spiritual support. Two providers indicated that they provided training and workshops for residents, although the content of these was not specified.

Staffing and Support to Young People

All but one provider said they held residents meetings and others indicated that key worker support was an essential component of what was available to young people. All providers indicated that they provided support to young people. In terms of staffing arrangements this centred around 24-hour support, with workers providing day time support, with night time cover being provided by workers sleeping on site or there being access to an out of hours emergency service. Only two providers (seven percent) indicated they also had access to floating support, which would be important for those moving on to other forms of independent living.

Providers were asked how often they had informal and formal contact with young people. 20 indicated that they saw them on a daily basis as part of general contact. A further 13 providers indicated they had formal sessions with key workers, the majority of these (85 percent) were held weekly, with one apiece being held fortnightly and monthly. 8 providers indicated they would also see young people as needs dictated or young people could approach them in the course of daily contact.

In terms of the type of support provided to young people, teaching life skills (which includes cooking, shopping and budgeting) and providing assistance with benefits appeared with the most frequency, closely followed by making referrals to specialist agencies as necessary and providing assistance with rent arrears; this was provided by 28 of the providers on average. 26 providers indicated providing assistance with household disputes. Shelter (2005) identified that young people generally appreciated life skills training and any assistance given in respect of helping them to live independently.

In terms of issues that relate to the criminal justice system, 25 providers said they would assist a young person to observe any requirements imposed upon them by the criminal justice system and 20 would do likewise in relation to an ASBO. A number of providers indicated that the support and assistance provided to young people would depend on the

support needs that had been identified, indicating that this was potentially open ended and wide ranging.

Interestingly, the interviews conducted with young people did not reflect this level of support from housing providers and due to the sampling strategy used for the housing provider survey many young people had direct experience of the accommodation or support on offer from those surveyed. In fact, only four young people mentioned receiving support from hostel staff (and this was not always positive) and young people were often unsure whether they had ever lived in supported accommodation.

Length of Stay

Housing providers were asked whether there was a minimum and maximum length of stay in the accommodation they provide. Two thirds responded there was a maximum period and one third that there was not.

The minimum period could be as short as a day, whereas the maximum ranged from accommodation that was intended to be short term, for example residents could stay there for a maximum of 18, 24, 28, 30 or 31 days, to that which is medium term for example six or nine months, to that which is intended to be long term, in which young people can reside for up to two years. Only one provider indicated there was no maximum period (although they indicated the average stay was 12 months).

Providers were asked how long on average young people stayed with them. There was not a significant amount of information provided in this section, but in terms of short term placements, averages of 12, 18 and 20 days were indicated. Regarding the medium term, there was more indication young people would stay for the maximum allowance of six or nine months and in accommodation that provided the option to stay for two years, six, nine, 12 months and the full term were all quoted.

Shelter (2005) indicates that young people living in temporary accommodation do not always realise that the arrangement is not long term or permanent. There were indications that they could expect to wait between six and 12 months before being rehoused in somewhere more permanent. Shelter also identified that a half of English authorities stated that time spent in hostels is likely to have increased.

Steps Taken to Move On

Providers were asked what steps were taken to assist young people to move on. 29 providers indicated they would make applications to housing associations for more permanent accommodation, 28 would provide assistance in accessing private rented accommodation and make referrals to move on accommodation, 27 would make a referral to a specialist housing provider (this could include foster care or placement in a residential school, if appropriate), 26 would explore the possibility of reconciliation with the family and 24 would ensure that where appropriate the young person was on a local authority housing waiting list.

Once again, it is interesting that very little of this type of assistance and support from accommodation providers was reflected in the young people's interviews.

Leaving of Own Accord

Providers were asked for the main reasons why young people leave the accommodation of their own accord. The main reason that was cited was lack of compliance with the licence agreement (21 providers), followed by not wanting support (13 providers). Two providers mentioned problems with staff and six cited problems with other residents. It is also possible that if there are problems they may relate to the lack of compliance with licence agreements. Six providers indicated that young people left because they did not like the living arrangements; it is not possible to determine whether this is the physical environment or rules and regulations. Six providers (20 percent) indicated that young people also moved on because they were successfully making the transition to independent living and no longer needed as much support.

Reason for Placement Breaking Down

Providers were also asked about the main reasons for placements breaking down. Non-payment of rent was cited by 20 providers, followed by non-engagement with support (17 providers), aggression to staff or residents (14 providers), use of substances on the premises (11 providers) and abandonment (10 providers). Six providers noted offending behaviour.

The Home Office study focusing on substance use (Wincup et al, 2003) found that 23 percent of young people placed in hostel accommodation had been excluded from homeless services at some point in the previous year¹²⁹ and that exclusions were generally temporary. In that study reasons for exclusions included conflict with staff or other service users and substance use (drugs, alcohol or drug dealing). The study identified that the focus of housing providers is generally to support the individual to maintain the tenancy and to successfully move on and that in this respect, they would try and offer specialist support rather than to debar them. The young people interviews in this study do not appear to support this assertion, however, and so it is possible that there is a difference between what housing providers say they do and what they actually do.

Preventing Placement Breakdown

All providers in this study said that they were unlikely to ask a young person to leave their premises if things are going wrong, without finding out why, helping them to understand where they are going wrong and giving them the opportunity to address their problems and to comply with the requirements of the premises. One provider indicated they would set up a behaviour contract in such circumstances and agree goals and standards in terms of what was expected. The responses of providers also indicated they would liaise with other agencies and individuals to try and resolve issues and this would include YOT workers (mentioned by 26 of the providers) where appropriate.

All but one of the providers indicated they would issue warnings and 23 indicated that if notice had been given to the young person to leave the premises this would be reviewed in the notice period, if appropriate.

¹²⁹ Due to the substance misuse focus, this may be a higher percentage than for the general population of young people placed in hostel accommodation.

The discrepancy between what housing providers surveyed and what the young people interviewed said indicates that there may be a breakdown in communication between the two. None of the young people interviewed indicated that they had been involved in any discussion around their behaviour in the accommodation prior to eviction; in fact, in a small number of cases they specifically stated that there had been no discussion. This may be an area requiring further consideration.

Moving On

Providers were asked where young people generally moved on to when they left the accommodation. 25 providers indicated that it tended to be to other local authority accommodation, and 18 that it could be to private accommodation. 11 providers suggested that young people may return to their family, eight to friends and five to the extended family or a relative. Six providers also indicated that the young person could become homeless as a result of leaving the accommodation.

Other places that they might move on to included moving into housing association accommodation, B&Bs, another hostel, specialist accommodation such as a residential school or to supported accommodation with less assistance as part of the transition to more independent living.

Gaps in Provision

Finally, housing providers were asked what gaps existed in terms of local provision. The issue that was most commonly reported on related to the lack of accommodation generally. For example, a limited number of places available for young people requiring accommodation, a poor range of options, not enough accommodation for young people with high support needs, lack of floating support, lack of landlords providing private rented accommodation and lack of move on accommodation generally and affordable flats in particular – points supported by the findings from the area focus groups discussed previously.

Chapter 6 – Aspirations and case studies

The following chapter examines the young people's hopes and aspirations for their living arrangements and other factors including education and plans for the future. It also incorporates three case studies based on young people with whom follow-up interviews were conducted, which indicate how their experiences developed and changed over time.

Young People's Preferred Way to Live

On the whole, the interviews with the young offenders focused on their accommodation experiences however the study also sought to explore what the interviewees' preferred way to live was; what they thought made a good home or a bad home. This is reasonably difficult to disentangle – many of the young people described an 'ideal' way or place to live that was not always realistic, but then went on to discuss where or how they actually thought they would be living in the future. Some young people gave multiple answers to the 'preference' questions, others could not or would not think of anywhere or any way they would rather be living.

Living alone

The semi-structured interviews strongly indicated that the majority of the young people thought they wanted to live alone. 33 of the 54 young people who undertook the semi-structured interview said either that they preferred to live alone or that it was their aspiration to live alone. 14 of those thought that they would be living alone in six months time. The young people gave various reasons for why living alone would suit them better including:

- Having privacy
- Being independent
- Not being shouted out by parents
- Being able to make up your own rules
- Having your own space
- Being calm

One young person described how his childhood in care made him appreciative of being alone:

R: ...I enjoy living on my own. I do.

I: What's good about it?

R: Because I'm so used to being passed around and living in such different places, so much different rules and this, and that and the other. It's just doing my head in. In the end I just think what's the point of living there when I can live on my own? I don't have to have their stress and their bullshit. I just get on with it.

Clearly some of the interviewees who said they wanted to live alone have never done so and a small number said that if they lived alone they would want company too. One young man said that he would be able to make up his own rules if he lived alone and one of those would be to have his friends to stay “*all the time*”.

Living with family

Fourteen young people said that they would prefer to live with family members, of those, 11 said they wanted to live with their parent(s). Two young people said they would prefer to live with their grandparents and one with his brother.

Proximity to family was a clear theme in the semi-structured interviews: 14 interviewees stated that it was important for them to live near their family. Only one young person said they did not care whether their family was close by and two others said they did not want to see their family. Additionally, nine interviewees thought that having family in close proximity was one element that made a good home.

One interviewee who had chosen to live in a residential unit on release from custody due to tensions with his parents explained:

I: Is there anywhere you'd rather be living now?

R: At my house, at my mum's house with my family. That's the only place I can really call home to be honest...

I: But you still think you've done the right thing by not being back at home?

R: In a way I do, but sometimes when you...when you're in bed, you're just thinking and thinking 'what am I doing here? I need to be home with my family. I need to stop arguing. I need to sort it out'.

Living with others

Eleven young people said that they preferred to live with other people. In some cases the interviewees meant that they did not want to live alone but did not necessarily know who they would like to live with, others specified the person they wanted to live with. Three young men said that they would like to live with their girlfriends and two other interviewees said they wanted to live with friends. Seven young people indicated that they would be depressed or lonely if they lived alone, with one stating that he had got used to living with others in residential units.

Seven young people had indicated that proximity to their friends was important to a good home.

Preferred Place To Live

Fourteen young people identified that there were certain geographical places they would or would not like to live. Six said they would not like to live in a certain place – in three cases because the young person felt unsafe due to the levels of crime or drug use that took place there. The eight young people who identified particular places where they would like to live generally said this was because it was close to family or friends or was where they felt safest. One young person talked about wanting to leave the country and work abroad. Nine interviewees either had no preference about how or where they wanted to live or said that they did not know.

Accommodation Status in Six Months' Time

The young people in the study were asked where they thought they would be living in six months' time. Some answered this question according to where they wanted to be in six months' time and others according to where they believed they would actually be living then. Figure 5.1 illustrates their answers:

Figure 5.1: Where young people in the study sample thought they would be living in six months time (n=37)

Accommodation type	Number
Custody ¹³⁰	3
Parents	9
Own place	14
Foyer	1
Project/hostel	2
Foster care	2
Don't know	6

Education, Training and Employment Aspirations

Fifteen young people interviewed stated that they wanted to continue with or re-engage in education. A number said they had already identified and in some cases enrolled on college courses in subjects such as painting and decorating, health and social care and mechanics. Two young people stated that they hoped to get apprenticeships. One young person explained that they were returning to college to complete their GCSE's. Only one young person interviewed mentioned going to university.

In addition, 19 young people interviewed hoped to be in paid work in the future – some hoped they would have a job within six months. Only one individual appeared to have a job at the point of interview. Potential future jobs mentioned included working in construction, labouring, hairdressing, being a postman, a fireman, working in a gym, working in hotel management and being a mechanic. In a few cases it was clear that the young person had received careers advice or similar, with one or two mentioning input from Connexions staff.

One young person explained that he was prevented from finding work by his homeless status:

R: There's no point looking for a job until I've got somewhere to live cos I've already tried working whilst homeless and it didn't work.

I: Why?

R: Cos it was too hard. Going into work when I've had no sleep and stuff...I was either coming up from drugs when I was at work or coming down from drugs.

I: If you were working do you think you'd stop doing drugs or do you think you'd just do more?

¹³⁰ One young person was interviewed in custody and due to the length of his sentence would still be in custody in six months time.

R: I'd stop doing drugs if I had accommodation, but if I was homeless and I was working I couldn't cos it's hard to sleep when you're homeless. That's why I got into drugs.

Staying Out of Trouble

During the course of the interviews, ten young people suggested that they wanted to stop offending – some because they were ‘bored’ of it or because they did not want further custodial sentences. One young man explained that he needed to stop getting in trouble as he was soon to become a father. Two young people appeared to be pessimistic about their futures, with one stating:

I just want to get on with my life now. I see a black road. I see a dark road. I don't see no light from it. So I want to get on with my life and I want people to leave me alone. There is no one keeping out for me.

General Aspirations

Some of the young people interviewed hoped for marriage and children and talked about leading happier, more enjoyable and even safer lives:

I'll have my own place, college, doing part-time work. And that's it really. Having my friends over and just enjoying life, socialising. And that's all I want to do. I'm not asking for much. I'm not asking for a six- bedroomed house with a lot of money in my pocket. I'm just asking for a stable home, somewhere stable. And I know I'm going to be safe. So I can't see...I'm not asking for a lot. And I've never asked for a lot.

Only six young people said they did not know where they wanted to be in six months time.

A Good Home

The young people interviewed were asked what they thought made a good home. As has already been discussed in previous chapters, proximity to friends and family was seen as important to the young people and so a number stated that a good home would be one with their friends and family in it or near by. Ten said that a good home would mean they lived with nice people who respected them and the house; one young person said that “*nice staff and the kids in there*” made a good home (even though he was being asked about a good home generally, rather than a good residential unit). Being cared for and loved occurred in several interviews:

*I: What are the things that for you means ‘this is a good place to be living’?
R: Someone to love me, someone to care for me, just the whole home surrounding. Like I said, you know how it is when you walk through the front door you just feel you're home.*

Fourteen interviewees mentioned the physical properties of a good home, for example, having a Play station, nice furniture or their own bedroom. Seven young people thought that a good home needed to be clean and tidy. 16 young people placed importance on being warm, well fed, comfortable or safe. These are not necessarily factors one would

expect young people aged 13 to 18 to consider important and may perhaps indicate how their accommodation histories have affected them.

Three young people initially said that they did not know what made a good home, two of those provided answers when encouraged by the researcher, the third (a young woman who had lived in care throughout her childhood) responded:

I: What makes a good home for you?
R: Not a lot.
I: Not a lot makes a good home?
R: No.
I: What do you mean?
R: Because there is no such thing as a good home.

The young people who undertook the semi-structured interview were also asked if they had ever lived with anyone they liked or loved; their answers are summarised in figure 5.2 below.

Figure 5.2 – living with someone I like or love

Who?	How many?
Parents	14
Family	9
Friends	4
Girl/boyfriend	5
Get on with everyone	2

Four young people said they had never lived with anyone they liked or loved, one of those saying that they were too young to remember.

A Bad Home

A number of the young people’s views of what made a bad home centred on the people that might be living there or nearby. Five said that living with or near drug users would be bad and this fits with the discussion in chapter 3 regarding their views of suitability. Four interviewees stated that staff made a bad home (some clarified that they meant staff who did not treat them well others were more general); in fact, three young people said that foster care and residential units were bad homes. Three stated that living with their step-father was bad. Nine young people said that violence or tension and aggression in the home was bad:

I: What makes a bad home?
R: [pause] Shouting and screaming. No space, foul language. Misuse of like... You know, like if I look up to my mum and we’re living in a family atmosphere and she’ll put me down and start shouting at my dad and make friction between us. That doesn’t cause a nice atmosphere.

Given that several young people felt that cleanliness, safety and security were important to a good home, it is not surprising that homes that are unclean, unsafe, cramped and so on were considered to be bad. One young person stated that living in a home with CCTV made it a bad one, reflecting on his experience in B&B’s and residential units.

In four cases, the young people felt that the local area or neighbours could make a bad home, suggesting, for example, being asked to turn their music down by local neighbours.

The young people were also asked if they had ever lived with anyone that made them feel bad. Their responses are summarised in figure 5.3 below.

Figure 5.3 – living with someone who made me feel bad

Who?	How many?
Parents	7
Step-parents	3
Foster parent	2
Family	1
Friend	1
Residential unit staff	3
Other residents	5

When the young people were asked to explain why or how they had been made to feel bad their responses included being told off, constant arguing, being made to feel small and because of that person’s drug use.

Eight young people said they had never lived with anyone who made them feel bad, with a couple stating that they would not ‘put up’ with that.

Case Studies

First case study

‘A’ was first interviewed in the community when she was 17 years old and then approximately five months later when she was 18. She is a Black African young woman and was attending a YOT in an urban and inner city area. At her first interview, A was living principally with her mother, but also stayed with her friend occasionally. In the past she had also lived with one of her sisters (in separate accommodation to their mother). She said she had recently been homeless and on that occasion had stayed out on the streets for a few hours and then went to a friend’s house to sleep.

A had been deeply affected by early childhood experiences and tension between her and her mother in the family home. This was evident when she became tearful during her interview and also in supervisions with her YOT key worker. A’s father died in 2004 and other family members had also passed away. Her relationship with her mother was described as ‘poor’ by her key worker. A’s siblings were known offenders (drugs and firearms offences). Furthermore, A had previously been referred to social services for suicide attempts and it was alleged that she had been assaulted by one of her sisters. A said she had a social worker but had never been placed ‘in care’.

A’s primary offence was common assault and she was also charged for possession of a bladed article and TWOC. In her interview, she said she had committed the TWOC offence (with a friend) because of boredom. Her YOT worker felt that the offences were

committed because of ‘heightened emotions and anger’ about her troubled past and because she was easily influenced by her peers – although A refuted the latter assertion.

First interview:

I: What about your mum, did you get on with your mum?

R: Sometimes.

I: What sort of things do you argue about?

R: Everything.

Second interview:

I: Okay, so did you really want to move out of your mum’s?

R: Yes.

It was clear from A’s interviews that she wanted to leave the family home and live by herself. Previously she had approached the council but felt they were taking too long. Two YOT practitioners then referred A to a supported housing provider in the area. This housing provider can accommodate young people in flats, and a support worker also works with the residents in order to stabilise them and prepare them for move-on into independent living.

In her first interview A said that when she was referred to the housing provider, there was a two or three week wait for an appointment. She had one appointment with the housing provider and as a result of this was told she had been accepted on to the waiting list.

Approximately one month after her initial interview, A’s *Asset* scores were as follows:

Asset domain	Score¹³¹
Living arrangements	2
Family and personal relationships	2
Education, training and employment	2
Neighbourhood	0
Lifestyle	1
Substance use	2
Physical health	0
Emotional and mental health	0
Perception of self and others	1
Thinking and behaviour	1
Attitudes to offending	0
Motivation to change	1

At the point of her second interview, A had completed her order and was no longer in contact with the YOT. She had moved in to her supported accommodation; a studio flat with a kitchen and bathroom. A lived by herself and her neighbours were other young

¹³¹ Each of the 13 sections of *Asset* are ‘scored’ by practitioners according to the extent to which each section is perceived to be related to the young person’s likelihood of future offending. A 0-4 scale is used with 0 indicating no perceived link and 4 indicating a strong link (Baker et al, 2002).

people in supported accommodation – all of them male. A described being settled in her flat:

I: Do you think it meets your needs... ?

R: No I'm okay for now with what I've got, yeah.

I: And what sort of things do you think you need where you live?

R: Nothing much really. I'm okay with what I've got.

I: So you've got room to do a bit of cooking and stuff like that.

R: Yeah.

I: And are you happy there?

R: Yeah...Because I'm on my own innit and that's all I wanted – my own space.

A said she met with a support worker on a weekly basis. The support worker had helped A find a college place to study Psychology and was also due to place A on the housing register for a council flat. A was asked if she had ever experienced any problems while living in her flat and she reported that she had not. She also reported no negative experiences with the supported housing provider. Her rent was being paid by Job Seeker's Allowance.

When asked whether she had committed any offences since the last interview, A said she had not. Overall she appeared to be a lot more secure.

Second case study

The initial interview with 'B' took place when he was 15 years old and in the community. B's second interview was carried out approximately five months later, when he was 16 and still in the community. He is a white British young man and was attending a YOT in an urban setting.

B's case study is particularly complicated due to his childhood experiences and various accommodation situations. In early childhood, B had lived with his mother who was a heroin user, and his brother. Subsequently, the two brothers moved in with their father (who was a known offender) and stepmother. When B was eight years old, his father passed away and this meant that he was separated from his brother and subsequently spent seven years moving between family members (in different parts of the country) and then into an exceptionally high number of placements 'in care'. In addition, according to his *Asset*, he had been abused and witnessed other violence in the family context but no further details were provided.

B has had substantial contact with social services for a large part of his childhood. He sees his social worker on a monthly basis. He was, however, critical of social services because he had not been in education for four years prior to being interviewed. Furthermore, B felt that social services had only moved him around and not done anything to house him in his own place.

R: Erm I started off, my dad died and I moved to my Aunt [name] and that was in [City 1]. Then I moved to my Nan's which is in [City 2]. Then I moved to [City 3] and I went to about four main foster carers up there and then like just like about 12 like you know respites, where you go... they move you until they find you a place. Then I moved back down to [City 2]. Then I started

running away a lot you know. Stayed at my friend's house and that. So they moved me to [City 4]. And I lived there for about four weeks and that was just like temporary thing. Then I moved back to [City 2] again. And just like lived around [City 2] and that. And then went into secure and I come out. And I went into a private home [?] 15 weeks. And that was alright, but it was just boring. And they just wouldn't let me out or nothing, so I left that and then I went to the one in [place name in City 1], then I moved again to [place name in City 1] and then I moved in with [current foster carer]. So...

I: How many different placements have you had?

R: Including respite stuff, it's 42 I think? Like respites and short terms and that.

I: And have you ever lived with people that you really liked or really loved? Can you think of...?

R: Yeah... I used to live with my dad you know when I was young and that, I loved him. Apart from that I just got used to being moved around so that I never really got used to a place.

In terms of living with his family, his YOT key worker noted that he has very little contact with his mother because of her heroin use. B has also been embroiled in the fallout from a burglary committed by his brother in the house of his older half-brother. He felt that his extended family members did not like him. The reasons given by B for so much movement between care placements were being thrown out for fighting or criminal damage, and because he had run away. He had experienced a number of placements where he did not get on with staff who he described as 'control freaks', and he named one instance of being racially bullied by other residents. As an indication of how familiar B had become with living in care, when he was asked what makes a 'good home' in his interview, he replied "*Nice staff and the kids in there*".

At the point of his first interview, B was living with his brother in his stepmother's house (the wife of his late father). She had initially offered to foster B's brother and then agreed to foster B when he was thrown out of a children's home for committing arson. B said he was very happy living with his stepmother because he is with his brother, has more freedom than he had experienced in care and feels he has been behaving himself. The only disadvantage is living with his half-brother who uses crack cocaine and is mentally ill.

B's *Asset* was completed approximately a month before his first interview and his scores were as follows:

Asset domain	Score
Living arrangements	4
Family and personal relationships	4
Education, training and employment	4
Neighbourhood	Not scored
Lifestyle	2
Substance use	2
Physical health	1
Emotional and mental health	2
Perception of self and others	Not scored
Thinking and behaviour	1
Attitudes to offending	0
Motivation to change	1

According to *Asset*, B's primary offence was theft and handling and in his interview he said he had also breached his bail conditions by committing a theft of a bicycle. This offence was committed while he was living at his stepmother's house and he had done it because he liked the bicycle and had the opportunity. He had been with his brother at the time. When asked why he had committed other offences in the past (such as burglary, breaking into a car and actual bodily harm), B replied that he had done so to pay for drugs, principally cannabis which he smoked daily.

I: Like you said burglary and breaking into a car. Is that to get money and stuff like that?

R: To get money, yeah. That's all to get drugs and that.

I: Okay. You said that you use cannabis. Have you always used that? How long have you used that for?

R: Until I... when I've come down [City 1] I smoked like every day, but before I never used to smoke it as much. I used to smoke it like... Like I couldn't afford it really so I never used to smoke it that much, man. I started smoking when I was about 12 you know. Proper like... proper smoking and that.

I: So when did you... So have you been smoking it consistently since you were 12? Like...

R: Yeah, kind of. Like whenever I can get it and that.

I: Yeah. Why do you smoke do you think?

R: Weed?

I: Mm.

R: It just makes you feel better and that, you know. Just makes you feel better... Before I went in [children's home] I was pretty much addicted to Ecstasy innit. I was taking them every day and that...

When B was interviewed almost five months later, he had turned 16 years old and was living with his stepmother. He described there being some tension at home, mostly because of his younger brother who was arguing with the step-parents and half-brother and telling the step-parents about B's cannabis use. Although B was happy to be living with his brother and stepmother, there were some signs of relationships being strained.

I: Like why is it good that you live where you do? Is it because it's nice to live with your brother?

R: Yeah, I like living with me brother, even though he's a little shit. You know, I get on with him, like.

I: Yes. And is it nice to have your foster mum around?

R: Yeah like she's alright. She never shuts up though when she starts.

I: Is she quite strict?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah. And are you happy there basically?

R: Oh yeah, it's nice. It's a nice house.

I: Yes.

R: It's not like too strict on the rules and that. I'm allowed to stay out. Not very nosey and that...

I: ...And has she ever...Has she threatened to chuck you out or anything like that?

R: Yeah. She does it all the time in an argument. It's 'I'll put you in care'.

I: But does it ever come to anything?

R: No. She just says it 'cos she's angry and that's the only thing she can say.

In his first interview B had criticised social services for not finding him his own place and in the second interview, he still wanted to live on his own and in his own flat. He was in touch with a worker from the leaving care team who was preparing B to live in a foyer once he left his stepmother's house. If B did well in the foyer he thought he would then be moved on to his own flat where he could be independent. The preparatory work included showing B the foyer accommodation, teaching him how to budget and informing him about what welfare benefits he would be entitled to and how many hours he could work. However, B was apprehensive about the prospect of moving out of his stepmother's house:

I feel like she wants me...to push me straight away until I get my own place. I don't think I'll just be able to cope straightaway...I've said to her [leaving care team worker] I'll stay at my foster parents' if it's alright with my foster parents. She says 'fair enough'.

B said that although he was not carrying out domestic burglaries any more, he had occasionally committed opportunistic thefts. Again this was in order to pay for cannabis or cigarettes. B was still using cannabis daily to relax and get to sleep, or because of boredom. He was not receiving any support or advice about his use (from his YOT key worker or anyone else) but did not think he needed it because he was not "addicted to it". B also said he had been in a "few fights" and rationalised the most recent one because someone had 'snapped' at his girlfriend.

On being asked what makes a good home for the second time, B replied nice people and nice 'stuff'. This marked a slight change from his previous answer, however in terms of what makes a bad home, B was still affected by his experiences of being in care.

It's like I lived in a few homes and the staff used to wind me up and then I'd kick off and then I'd have nothing, you know I've lost everything. And they just used to find that funny.

Third case study

When 'C' was first interviewed in the community he was 17 years old. C is a white British young man who was attending a YOT in a rural area. At that time, he was sleeping on the sofa at the house of family friends. They had taken C in to give him a break from sleeping in a tent that had been given to him by social services. He had been in that situation for a few weeks over the summer period. Both during his stay in the tent and at the friends' house, C said he had been very unhappy. The friends were due to go on holiday the week after the interview, in which case C would have to sleep in the tent again.

C's calendar shows that his housing situation had been very unstable in the 12 months prior to his first interview. C's *Asset* completed nearly one month before the interview showed his score for Living Arrangements was 4, which is the maximum.

Asset domain	Score
Living arrangements	4
Family and personal relationships	4
Education, training and employment	3
Neighbourhood	3
Lifestyle	4
Substance use	3
Physical health	2
Emotional and mental health	3
Perception of self and others	2
Thinking and behaviour	4
Attitudes to offending	3
Motivation to change	3

The housing instability was triggered when C left his family home following a physical fight with his step-father, as well as being arrested and convicted for a number of offences. C's step-father had moved in with him and his mother when he was young and the relationship was a negative one throughout his childhood.

I: And have you ever lived with anyone who made you feel really bad...?

R: Yeah, my step-dad...He got on my nerves.

I: Why?

R: Just every day. Everything he did got on my nerves...He blackmails my mum to get to me...I would ask my mum for something or help and he would put something in...I don't know what because I wasn't there to hear it [because C was sent to boarding school], but he would say something to her which would make her change her mind and go dead against it.

I: Right. Okay. And how long has your step-dad lived with your mum?

R: Since I was two.

I: Oh, so most of your life really. So you would think he could be more like a dad really.

R: Yeah...That's the thing though. He's...come into my life trying to be my dad and that's what I've been rejecting him as. I haven't wanted him to be my dad.

After C was thrown out of the family home (aged 16), he was placed in B&B accommodation by the local authority. He stayed there for almost six months and seemed happy, however he was thrown out for sneaking friends in to stay one night. C was told by 'the council' that because he had been thrown out of the B&B for breaking rules he was deemed intentionally homeless and they could no longer help him. C then stayed in a hostel for three months, from which he was kicked out for staying out all the time and having a party in his room. C was then living in a squat for another three months until social services placed him in a B&B. He was not clear why, but social services stopped paying his rent after approximately one month, which left him street homeless. This was when he was given a tent.

According to C there were no statutory services that were in touch with him and helping him with his housing situation. Furthermore, he seemed to lack the confidence – and sometimes the will – to approach any organisation. The only place he said he had received help from was the local resource centre which gave advice about housing.

I: And what about the YOT? Do you get any help from the YOT with your housing?

R: No.

I: Have they ever asked you about it?

R: They've asked me where I'm living.

I: What about when you were in the tent?

R: ...there's nothing really they can do.

I: Right. So they just don't have any responsibility for it.

R: No.

I: Okay. And what about social services? Do you ever have appointments with them? Do they ever want to talk to you about it or check out how you are or...?

R: Not really...

I: ...So is this the longest you've had nowhere really permanent to go?

R: Yeah. I didn't think this would happen...

I: ...And how does that make you feel?

R: Anxious maybe...

I: ... Could you prioritise your housing?

R: I want to but then it...When it gets down to it then I can't be bothered, if you know what I mean. I really want to do it. But then I can't. Then I don't...

I: ...Is it because it's a bit scary to go?

R: ... 'Cos I don't know what to do or say.

The primary offence noted on *Asset* for C was vehicle theft. In his interview, he also mentioned criminal damage and public order offences. In his first interview, C said his offending while he was homeless (for example, in the squat and tent) was in order to pay for food. C did not know why he had committed the other offences and he might not have wanted to tell the researcher, but he also had ADHD which might have affected his memory. At the point of first interview, C was using speed, Ecstasy and cannabis on a regular basis.

C was interviewed a second time approximately four months later. In the interim he had stayed with a friend occasionally but sometimes had to sleep in the tent. Eventually, he had been moved into a B&B because he and his mother – as well as his YOT key worker and drugs worker – had lobbied the council about his housing situation. C was in contact with his mother much more than he had been at first interview, in that he had turned to her for help – which she had given – and was also eating meals at her house daily. C did not like his step-dad but was making an effort to get on with him so as to “keep the peace”.

I: And then we just kept on at the council, on and on and on and then they gave me another chance. And I've been told now that I've got a flat but it's gotta be refurbished and I've gotta wait for that though.

I: How long?

R: About a month. Yeah, fingers crossed.

I: Are you pleased?

R: Yeah I am. A lot. I've had quite a hard life...

I: ...So you got to the B&B because you and your mum just harassed the council until they gave in?

R: Yeah.

I: Was there anyone else helping you?

R: The social worker, er the Youth Offending Team, they did help. My drugs worker was a big help I think...They were all on to the council.

C appeared to be much more engaged about his own housing situation and had gone from having almost no input from social services to seeing his social worker once a week. This meant that someone was giving him the ‘nudge’ to keep appointments and sort out his welfare benefits. He was looking forward to moving into the flat.

...it will be my own place where I can make it into my home. That's what I've been waiting for since I left home, you know what I mean? I haven't had somewhere where I can make it really cosy without having to move out two weeks later.

At the point of his second interview, C said he had committed more offences but did not wish to disclose what these were, although he did say that some of this was to pay for drugs. He said he did not plan to offend but would do so if the opportunity presented itself. He also reported that he had been arrested since his last interview, although he did not say what this was for. Since his last interview, C had reduced his daily use of speed and was using Ecstasy every couple of months. He was using cannabis daily because he did not like being ‘sober’ and did not see the point of ceasing to use.

Conclusions

The Research Aims

The two principal research aims were met. These were to provide a picture of the visible and hidden housing issues which face young people who are involved in the youth justice system. And to do this particularly from the perspective of young people, whilst taking account of the views of practitioners and stakeholders.

The study was based on data collected and collated from ten YOT sites across England and Wales. It also attempted to construct picture of current housing trends in England and Wales. This proved to be difficult to achieve because data is not collated in a uniform fashion and is not usually directly comparable or straightforward to understand or present.

The research sampling strategy successfully identified young people in housing need. The whole sample had experienced problems related to their accommodation, 75 percent of the sample had lived with someone other than a parent at some time in their lives. Additionally 40 percent were or had been homeless or had sought formal housing provision and / or support¹³².

Findings – The characteristics of the young people

The young people who experience housing problems and who are supervised by YOTs are principally a vulnerable group with a range of needs which are both criminogenic and non-criminogenic. Their accommodation problems are normally related to difficult, tense or abusive family relationships which have usually existed for many years prior to any episode of leaving home. Many of the young people will have run away from home or care in the past. There was a high level of recorded and reported family instability often characterised by abuse of the young person, the witnessing of domestic violence, periods spent ‘in care’ and bereavement. *Asset* showed 40 percent of the overall sample to have been abused although 25 percent of the data were missing. The interviews with the young people suggested that 49 percent of them had been ‘in care’ and 71 percent had ever had a social worker.

There were no significant differences with regard to the experiences of those in housing need or having been ‘in care’ by ethnicity. However, in contrast with other studies ours suggests that those of white ethnicity are more likely to be placed with other family members when there are difficulties. With regard to girls and young women, they were no more likely to experience housing problems, but if they did then they were significantly more likely to be homeless. This is congruent with research by Shelter (2005). However, stakeholders in the ten sampled areas did not appear to be aware of this pattern.

The most common recent offence amongst the sample was a primary offence of violence against the person (17.5 percent) and in general the pattern of offending was of

¹³² Our definition includes those who are ‘street’ homeless, those in temporary accommodation and those living independently; this is discussed later in more detail.

a more serious nature. However, living arrangements were not clearly linked to any offence pattern. Young people identified and linked their offending behaviour to the family home and often this was related to stresses and tensions there, or to the close proximity of offending peers or relatives. They were also more likely to commit a wider range of offences when living at home. Homelessness did not appear related to any particular offending behaviour, although young people were more likely to describe petty offending at this time linked clearly to need, such as for food. With regard to experiences of being in temporary accommodation young people described more episodes of fighting or violence, although they did not always perceive this as 'offending' and usually portrayed this as an attempt to defend or protect themselves.

In general the young people in the sample had unsettled housing patterns with the average number of minimum movements made in the last twelve months being 2.7. This showed a high degree of instability for many in the sample, which it is likely would have affected their ability to engage with the YOT and other educational or social provision, as well as contributing to other physical or mental health problems or well being generally. There was no difference between those who were living in the community or who were in custody. However those who had been remanded into custody were less likely to have lived in the parental home in the last 12 months and overall their living arrangements appeared more unsettled.¹³³

Findings – Becoming Homeless

This study provided clear evidence that the young person's mother usually made the final decision that led to the young person leaving the family home. This often followed long periods of difficult or abusive family relationships, the young person's offending behaviour and a range of other needs. This is supported by other research studies.

Homelessness is, for young people in this study, largely masked by their short-term attempts to cope with it. This usually involved staying with friends and friends' families, and lead to a situation often referred to as 'sofa surfing'. Our study would suggest that this lifestyle is one which is both itinerant and unsettled. It leaves young people vulnerable and they clearly gave evidence of this in interview. It also makes it considerably more difficult for them to engage with school, YOTs and other agencies. Nonetheless, it was the preferred option for most of the young offenders sampled when compared to the formal forms of temporary accommodation which are available.

Young people in this study assessed the suitability of temporary housing on the basis of different criteria than adult practitioners and stakeholders. They placed significantly greater emphasis on safety and cleanliness and less emphasis on the nature of the provision. The former is interesting as young people were also more likely to talk about violent offending or becoming involved in violent episodes when they were in temporary accommodation, including children's homes. Additionally, young people in temporary accommodation reported that they had been the victim of crime more frequently than those who had been street homeless. It could be, therefore, that the lack of security and safety which young people feel might contribute to these actions.

¹³³ These findings should be treated with caution as just nine young people were interviewed whilst remanded in custody.

The role of staff in enforcing rules which made young people feel safe was seen as important and positive. Rules that young people considered inhibited or restricted them, or which they did not understand, provoked a negative response. Feeling unsafe and in a restricted environment contributed to the young person not feeling 'at home' in the accommodation and may also contribute to placement breakdown.

Cleanliness was very important to young people and dirty accommodation could lead to immediate placement breakdown and to the young person feeling significantly undervalued.

Once young people enter temporary forms of accommodation or become homeless, they appear to suffer elevated levels of depression, loneliness and other anxieties. They are often hungry and concerned for their own safety and appear more likely to become involved in physical fights. They are also more likely to report problems with their physical or mental health.

Findings - Accessing Accommodation

Young people and practitioners reflected on the difficulties of accessing formal accommodation. Housing law is complex and there are also regulations and differing local interpretations, which can appear to be obstacles and insurmountable hurdles to many young people. Further they are seeking to cope with these at a time of vulnerability and anxiety.

As noted above, housing difficulties often led to disrupted education for the young people in the sample. Poor literacy skills create further barriers to accessing accommodation and other services and emphasise how important targeted and reflexive help for young people in housing difficulty is. The aspirations of the young people in this study highlighted that many were concerned to improve their educational achievement and saw this as key to achieving many of their future goals.

The sampling strategy identified a group of young people for whom accommodation problems were just one of a number of inter-related needs and vulnerabilities. Almost half of the young people had been the victims of abuse, others had been witnesses to domestic violence and serious episodes of family breakdown and bereavement; frequently these experiences were related to their housing need. The majority of young people had had contact with social services, but their views of the support offered either currently or in the past were extremely negative; this was in contrast to the feedback about all other professional groups. Furthermore, it would not seem that it is simply the nature of the work which social services do (working with families in difficulty) which leads to this negative portrayal, as the experiences and examples which young people gave were clearly illustrative of poor practice. Both young people and YOT practitioners appeared to feel distanced from the decision making processes with regard to housing issues which might be made by social services, even where this concerned the individual themselves. This is an important issue as young people who fall under the provision of the Children (leaving Care) Act may not be receiving the help and support they require to lead stable and settled lives.

Additionally both the *Asset* records and the focus groups provided evidence that information sharing and inter-agency working between YOTs and social services are in many areas weak. An example of this was the significant gaps in the recording of 'in

care' and 'abuse' experiences of the young offenders in this study, evidenced in the *Assets* examined compared with their own reported experiences. These findings are supported by other studies (Arnall et al, 2005). Furthermore, the levels of victimisation and need presented by the young people in this study make the gaps in knowledge and information sharing unacceptable. The lack of information could have an impact on the ability of practitioners to effectively advocate and get young people the help and support they are entitled to.

Young people's experiences of the help and support they had received from local authority housing and homelessness departments were more mixed with examples of good and bad practice. The process of contacting housing departments was also identified as difficult and daunting for some. This suggests that the role of an advocate could be important and that housing authorities need to review and consider how they deliver services for young people. Additionally the Audit Commission (2004) made the recommendation that housing authorities should be part of the YOT management board. These factors need to be considered when YOTs are planning how they can develop accommodation strategies to improve access to local provision for young people.

The research identified a gap between the support which practitioners and housing providers said was available to young people in temporary housing and what young people perceived was available to them. They were most likely to portray staff in temporary accommodation as 'hidden' behind closed doors. With regard to other sources of help and advice, young people placed emphasis on the importance of these and were able to give accurate and detailed portrayals of good practice. They valued the advocacy and support skills of staff and were particularly impressed by staff who they felt went that little bit further. This finding mirrors other research findings (Arnall et al 2005; Rees and Wallace 1982) and appears to be particularly important in enabling young people to make their way through the complexities of accessing accommodation. The law in this area and the systems which flow from it are complex. It is not surprising that for the vulnerable and excluded group of young people who made up the majority of this sample working out how to get through the system is impossible and leads them at best to stay with friends, or at worst to become aggressive and violent, because they are frustrated with the process. Other studies also suggest that the youngest and newly homeless are most likely to be unaware or what help is available or ashamed or embarrassed to ask for it.

Many of the placements which the young people in this study had broke down. The young people were most likely to suggest that this was because of their own aggressive behaviour to other residents or staff, or because of rule infringements such as bringing friends into the accommodation. However the housing providers gave rent arrears as the most likely reason for placement breakdown. Additionally the most common offence amongst the sample was one for violence against the person, a further significant minority had convictions for arson and schedule 1 offences¹³⁴; all of these were said by housing providers sampled to render the young person unacceptable for admission to their hostel.

¹³⁴ See glossary for information on changes to Schedule 1 terminology.

The role of the accommodation officer in the YOT was not a clear one. At present the function needs to operate at a number of different levels raising awareness, providing input into planning processes, ensuring access to resources and providing specialist advice or liaison. Given the complexity of housing legislation and the different responses according to age and locality both young people and practitioners are often unsure about what can be expected and how to go about accessing help; practical advice and support are therefore important.

Recommendations

There are a number of recommendations or points for note or action which have emerged from this research:

- The three *Asset* domains (family relationships, living arrangements and neighbourhood) used to sample for this study have been shown, when aggregated, to allow for the identification of a population 'in need' of housing or 'at risk' of accommodation problems. This would appear to be a potentially useful tool for YOTs who wish to assess more clearly their population who are in need or at risk of accommodation problems. Furthermore, it is easily accessible data and available for all YOTs to use.
- A clearer picture of the pattern of homelessness and acute housing need amongst young offenders may also be evidenced by measuring a young person's situation and circumstances over time and at different points in their engagement with the YOT, for example when *Assets* are updated and at case review. The current performance measure is a snapshot at the end of an Order. Both of these points may be areas which the YJB might wish to focus on with regard to better understanding young offenders' housing problems across England and Wales and the number of young people at risk of homelessness. It could also help to give a more informed and representative local and national picture and provide more accurate information for the monitoring it is suggested that YOTs undertake as part of developing local accommodation strategies.
- There is the suggestion from this research, which is congruent with other evidence (Shelter 2005), that girls' needs are going unmet as they are significantly more likely to be homeless once they experience accommodation difficulties than boys. Practitioners and stakeholders were not aware of this gap in provision and it therefore seems important for the YJB to give some attention to this area.
- The elevated mental health *Asset* scores and the levels of depression, anxiety and loneliness reported by young people who took part in this study at times of more serious accommodation difficulties suggest that this is an area which should receive further focus. It also reinforces the fact that those living alone or having to cope without adequate support structures or family networks are particularly vulnerable in this respect.
- The standard and quality of accommodation available for young people is an issue of major concern to them and would appear to be a straightforward area on which local authorities and those commissioning accommodation could have an immediate and inexpensive impact. The key issue here is that those who influence and determine policy strive for standards to improve, so that anyone requiring a temporary placement is found clean accommodation. For example, the WAG is

introducing requirements that local authorities improve the standard of temporary accommodation.

- If a key aim of the forthcoming YOT accommodation strategy is to work towards family mediation as a response to family breakdown and homelessness for young people, then it would seem imperative that gaps in information sharing between YOTs and social services are plugged and that this area is given higher priority. It also suggests that there should be automatic liaison between social services and housing/homeless departments, when a young person presents as homeless, so that the best possible exchange of information and consideration of available options takes place. Failure to do so may place a young person at potential risk of harm and is more likely to perpetuate the likelihood that their needs will not be met.
- The availability of dedicated and specialist assistance to help young people to cope on a day to day basis with their living arrangements and to advocate for them if they get into difficulties is an area of support that some local authorities are already investing in, for example through floating support, but which needs further consideration with regard to young people and should be specifically available for all 16 and 17 year olds living independently (64 percent of the survey population). Those who have had fractured family relationships and move in and out of home are in effect trying to make the transition to independent living. It is important that young people's views are treated with seriousness and placed centrally within any planned responses to their housing situation. In some of these instances family mediation may not be the most appropriate course of action, whereas assistance with independent living skills may be. This may also help to lower the chance of placement breakdown which can then render the young person 'intentionally homeless'.
- Given that this study has indicated that young people in housing difficulty may be both the victims and perpetrators of violence in temporary accommodation, attention could be focused on the development of more effective strategies to deal with aggressive and/or violent behaviour in temporary accommodation in order to avoid victimisation, evictions and Schedule 1 offence convictions¹³⁵. This suggests that staff in hostels should receive appropriate induction and refresher training in managing challenging and difficult behaviour in order to develop strategies to diffuse difficult and potentially problematic situations that could lead to an accommodation breakdown.
- Some of the issues that affect young people relate to wider policy considerations such as the application of the single room rent allowance which places young people at a disadvantage in the housing market. Further, the interpretation of housing legislation by local authorities can discriminate against rather than support young people seeking accommodation, particularly those with a criminal record and those who find it difficult to successfully maintain a tenancy. Both of these issues need to be addressed by central government and the WAG in order to provide a more supportive environment in which young people can succeed. Additionally, YOTs and housing departments need to strengthen their relationship, to provide

¹³⁵ See glossary for changes to Schedule 1 terminology.

opportunities for advocacy and intervention when a young person is either applying for accommodation or at risk of losing it.

- Housing and homelessness legislation makes provision for an individual who may be at risk of homelessness to be assessed within 28 days of an application being made. In practice local authorities do not appear to start the process of assessment of young people in custody until the point of release, rather than prior to it. This has implications for young people who are likely to be placed in temporary accommodation while an assessment takes place. Release dates are predictable and generally automatic and could be used to assist the planning for release and ensure that young people are appropriately accommodated on release. YOTs and housing/homeless departments need to develop protocols and agreements that would allow the process of assessing likely accommodation need to start at reception, in order to facilitate access to an appropriate placement on release.
- Housing policy does not appear at present to reflect the needs of young people which often require an immediate response to acute need on a short-term basis. Most housing providers surveyed in this study indicated that it would take at least a week for an assessment to take place; practice changes in this area are therefore indicated. Additionally, YOTs lack access to short term emergency accommodation that could, in the first instance, act as a stop gap. The housing needs of young people with whom the YOT comes into contact need to be fed into housing/homeless forums and the Supporting People programme in order to determine how these needs can best be met.
- The YJB has indicated the role of the accommodation officer should become more strategic in nature (YJB, 2006). This view is mirrored by the Audit Commission (2004) who suggest that accommodation officers should have a mixture of strategic and operational responsibilities. Young people appear to need an appropriately skilled and informed adult who can help them negotiate the complexities of housing law and regulations, as well as advocating on their behalf. The balance between the strategic and operational does therefore require consideration and it may therefore be of assistance to YOTs, if the YJB provided further guidance on how the role and function should be carried out and with what priority. It would also seem to be important that all newly appointed accommodation officers receive appropriate training in housing and accommodation matters.

Concluding remarks

This study has been able to provide an insight into the experiences and views of young offenders in housing need. It has balanced this against the views of practitioners, stakeholders and national trend data. The picture which results is one of vulnerable children and young people who, once they become homeless, find themselves in a world which often leaves them feeling unsafe, lonely, depressed and at risk. They feel uncared for because they do not understand the complex rules and systems which surround access to housing in England and Wales, and because they are often sent to accommodation where they are afraid of other residents or which is dirty. As a result of this and because many do not know what to do once they have left/been thrown out of the family home, they may be hidden from view, spending much time moving between friends' houses. The itinerant lifestyle which can then develop is not conducive to effective resettlement or leading an integrated, stable and non-offending lifestyle.

Appendix: Methods

The research took place between April and December 2005 and focused on 13 fieldwork sites, including ten youth offending teams and three custodial settings. The YOTs were selected on the basis of a broad mix of urban and rural settings. The YOIs were selected as additional fieldwork sites to increase the sample of young people who had been in custody. The sites have not been identified in order to protect anonymity for the sites and staff, and service users within them. Where specified therefore, services are referred to by randomly allocated identifiers (A-M).

The research was split into two phases, both of which drew on a range of quantitative and qualitative methods. Phase 1 focused on the collation of *Asset* data through the use of a specially constructed database, and structured interviews in the case study sites with young people identified from the sampling strategy. Phase 2 focused on the collection of more qualitative data in the case study sites, sourced through semi-structured interviews, observations and focus groups. It also included the analysis of trend data regarding young people's known housing needs. The key sources of data were:

Phase 1

Young People

Within each YOT, a sample of 20-30 young people who exhibited particular accommodation needs or issues was selected; this was on the basis of medium to high *Asset* scores¹³⁶ within the 'Living Arrangements', 'Family and Personal Relationships' and 'Neighbourhood' domains which signify risk of further offending. The intention was to produce an overall sample of 200-300 young people from YOTs. The sampling criteria were based on the highest aggregate score across the three domains to produce sufficient numbers for the sample. On the whole, this method of sampling provided a sufficient number of young people with accommodation problems for the study. Where this was not the case a 'snowballing' technique was used whereby YOT practitioners were asked to put forward young people for the sample. This accounted for no more than five young people in each site sample. This method was particularly helpful where YOTs had high turnovers of young people currently¹³⁷.

The most recent full *Asset* was requested on the final sample of 259 young people. In two cases an *Asset* could not be obtained, thus the *Asset* sample stands at 257. 139 structured interviews were completed, although attempts were made to interview all 259

¹³⁶ *Asset* scores range from 0 to 4 according to extent to which the 'domain' is considered to be linked to the young person's offending. A score of 4 indicates a strong perceived link between the domain and offending, a score of 0 indicates no perceived link.

¹³⁷ It is recognised, however, that the, albeit limited, use of the 'snowballing' method in this study may have introduced an element of bias into the study sample in that YOT practitioners may have put forward young people with whom they were most familiar or with whom they had done the most accommodation related work. Nevertheless, the young people recruited using this method had experienced accommodation difficulties and were suitable for inclusion in the study.

young people. Where interviews could not be completed with the young people (for example some failed to attend three appointments; others were deemed inappropriate for interview by their YOT practitioner) an interview was undertaken with YOT workers; this occurred in a total of 64 cases. In addition, a sample of thirteen young people was drawn from the three YOIs. These young people were interviewed, however *Asset* data had not been provided by the YOIs by the time analysis commenced. The total number of structured interviews carried out was therefore 152.

From the outset it was also an objective to over-sample for females and BME groups. This was done using YJB Themis¹³⁸ data relating to the distribution of disposals amongst males and females, and different ethnic groups in the financial year (FY) 03/04 (the most recent data available at the time). Disposal data was used as a proxy for the actual number of young people supervised by YOTs, as this data is not collected centrally by the YJB. Subsequently, a picture of a ‘target’ sample (in terms of gender and ethnicity) was drawn up for each site. Where possible, therefore, (i.e. where the sample drawn was over 30), the sample was reduced to the desired size in accordance with the target sample data.

The Themis data indicated that 14 percent of disposals were given to females in FY03/04 across all 155 YOTs. The target sample was therefore set at 20 percent females – an over sample of six percent. Nationally, the YJB data indicated that disposals were distributed to different ethnic groups as follows: White 83 percent, Mixed 2.2 percent, Asian 2.9 percent, Black 7.1 percent, Chinese/Other 1.1 percent, Not known 3.7 percent. It was decided that a target sample of 25 percent of subjects from the four BME groups would be appropriate, with the remaining 75 percent comprising subjects from a White ethnic group. This represents an over-sample of 11 percent assuming that the ‘not known’ population is distributed proportionately to the known ethnic groups. This resulted in a target sample of White 75 percent, Mixed 3.7 percent, Asian 5.7 percent, Black 13.7 percent, Chinese/Other two percent. The achieved samples for *Asset* data is compared to the target sample in Fig 1. This also shows achieved samples for interviews with young people, and proxy interviews, which are discussed presently:

Fig 1 – Characteristics of the sample

		Target	Interviews with young people (n=152)	Proxy interviews (n=61)**	<i>Asset</i> sample (n=257*)
Gender	Male	80%	83.6%	83.6%	82.5%
	Female	20%	16.4%	16.4%	17.5%
Ethnicity	White	75%	71.7%	77%	70.0%
	Black	13.7%	15.8%	8.2%	12.1%
	Asian	5.7%	2.6%	3.2%	2.7%
	Mixed	3.7%	7.2%	8.2%	7.4%
	Chinese/Other	2.0%	2.6%	3.3%	2.7%

¹³⁸ YJB Themis data is compiled from all YOT quarterly returns and is presented in the YJB’s Annual Report. It contains data on the number of offences and disposals processed by each YOT over a given time. It does not, therefore, count by individual offender.

*Ethnicities for 13 (5.1%) people were not recorded on *Asset* therefore n=244.

**The remaining three of the proxy interviews are not included here because their gender and ethnicities were unknown.

Note: Percentages may not equal 100 due to rounding errors.

Asset data

A large Access database was designed to collate the data pertaining to the young people in the sample and their housing needs. The primary source of data was the most recent *Asset* forms for each individual in the sample. In each site, this was obtained by a member of the research team visiting the site on a number of occasions to enter the *Asset* data directly onto a laptop containing the database. Alternatively, some YOTs preferred to provide the research team with anonymised hard copies of the *Assets*, or saved on to a disc. It is important to note that on average, interviews were conducted three to four months after the *Assets* were completed, and it is possible, therefore, that some of the data was outdated. Likewise, eight of the *Asset* forms had been completed at some point after the interviews were held.

Structured interviews

152 structured interviews were carried out with young people from the sample. The number of interviews conducted in each site is broken down in Figures 2 and 3 below:

Fig 2 - Characteristics of structured interviews

Site	Total interviews	No. in custody	Gender		Ethnicity				
			Female	Male	Asian	Black	Mixed Race	Other	White
A	9	3	1	8		1		1	7
B	9	2	1	8		1		1	7
C	14	5	4	10	1				13
D	13	3	3	10					13
E	20	9	2	18		1	2		17
F	12	1	1	11		6	1	1	4
G	22	15	3	19		1	1	1	19
H	5	2	2	3		1	1		3
I	17	6	1	16	2	5	3		7
J	18	2	2	16	1	7	3		7
K	4	4	4						4
L	5	5		5		1			4
M	4	4		4					4
Total	152	61	24	128	4	24	11	4	109

Fig 3 – Characteristics of structured interviews cont.

Site	Age				
	14	15	16	17	18
A	1	2	3	3	
B		2	3	4	
C		3	4	6	1
D		6	3	3	1
E	1	2	6	9	2
F			4	5	3
G	2	3	7	7	3
H	1	3	1		
I	2	2	4	8	1
J	1	3	1	10	3
K			1	1	2
L		1	3	1	
M				1	3
Total	8	27	40	58	19

The interviews were arranged via the respective staff at the YOTs, and various contacts in the YOIs. The interviews were held at the YOT buildings¹³⁹ (unless conducted in a custodial setting), and often coincided with the young people’s key work sessions or attendance at the service for another reason. The interviews sought to gain additional information to that drawn from *Asset*, focusing on their experiences of housing and accommodation issues, and the support they had received. The combining of these data sources also enabled their verification.

The participants were assured of the confidential and anonymous nature of the study before interviews commenced¹⁴⁰. They were also given a £10 high street gift voucher as a small token of ‘thanks’¹⁴¹.

The additional 64 proxy interviews that were conducted with YOT staff were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone, and focused on a much smaller number of questions; any questions that could only be answered directly by the young person (e.g. questions relating to current offending behaviour, and their views and thoughts about their housing situation) were eliminated. The characteristics of the proxy interviews are outlined below:

¹³⁹ One of the structured interviews was conducted over the phone.

¹⁴⁰ The young people were warned, however, that confidentiality might be broken if they gave information suggesting that they, or some other person, was at risk of suffering serious harm.

¹⁴¹ Young people in custody were sent a £10 postal order.

Fig 4 - Characteristics of young people for whom proxy interviews were conducted

Site	Total interviews	Gender		Ethnicity				
		Female	Male	Asian	Black	Mixed Race	Other	White
A	11	3	8	1	2	1		7
B	10	1	9					10
C	6	1	5			1		5
D	1		1					1
E	7	2	5					7
F	7	1	6		1	1		5
G	9		9			1		8
H	8	2	6		1	1		6
I	2	1	1				2	
J	3		3	1	1			1
Total	64	11	53	2	5	5	2	50

Fig 5 – Characteristics of young people for whom proxy interviews were conducted cont.

Site	Age							
	Un-known	11	14	15	16	17	18	19
A		1	2	1	3	2	2	
B				3	2	4	1	
C					1	4	1	
D							1	
E			1	1	1	4		
F			1		3	2	1	
G			3	4	1			1
H	3				1	3	1	
I					1	1		
J					2	1		
Total	3	1	7	9	15	21	7	1

Housing calendars

As part of the structured interviews, ‘calendars’ were used to track where the young people had lived in the previous 12 months. Participants were also asked a range of questions about the different places they lived during this time, including who they lived with, whether they had their own bed, whether they were happy at that time, and whether they were involved in any offending. The participants were also asked why they had moved from one accommodation type into another. This enabled us to form a detailed picture of the frequency of various types of accommodation, and to see whether any possible links between accommodation type, degree of happiness and offending frequency, emerged.

The calendars were devised to include ethnically and personally appropriate ‘memory prompts’ (for example, the young person’s birthday, major religious festivals and important sporting/social events) to aid more precise recording of accommodation difficulties and movements. In fact, few young people had trouble remembering where they had lived, when and how long for. The general exceptions to this were where

young people interviewed had moved multiple times in a short period, for example where they had spent time ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ between friends and family. Analysis of the calendars and comparison of this data with other sources used in the study suggested that the interviewees provided accurate and reliable data with a level of detail which was not formally available elsewhere.

Phase 2

Young People

Semi-structured interviews

For a number of the young people with whom structured interviews were carried out, semi-structured interviews were also undertaken as part of Phase 2 of the research. These interviews targeted a number of young people in each site who were identified (in their structured interview), as having a particularly high level of need around housing. The young people were selected on the basis that they reflected the range of housing difficulties experienced and a range of ethnicities, gender and ages. Practical considerations also played a part, however, namely doing the semi-structured interviews with those who were willing to be interviewed a second time, and those who were more forthcoming with their views¹⁴². A total of 54 semi-structured interviews were carried out. These are broken down by site in the table below:

Fig 6 - Characteristics of semi-structured interviews

Site	Total interviews	No. in custody	Gender		Ethnicity				
			Female	Male	Asian	Black	Mixed Race	Other	White
A	4		1	3					4
B	5	1		5		1			4
C	6	1	3	3	1				5
D	6	3	2	4					6
E	8	1	1	7			1		7
F	6		1	5		4	1		1
G	6	4	2	4					6
H									
I	7		1	6	1		2		4
J	6	2	2	4		2	2		2
Total	54	12	13	41	2	7	6		39

¹⁴² It is recognised that the practical considerations mentioned in selecting the young people to undertake the semi-structured interviews may have allowed for some bias of views or characteristics amongst this sample.

Fig 7 – Characteristics of semi-structured interviews cont.

Site	Age				
	14	15	16	17	18
A	1		1	2	
B		1	1	3	
C		1	1	3	1
D		1	2	2	1
E	1	1	2	3	1
F			2	3	1
G			1	4	1
H					
I	1		3	2	1
J	1			3	2
Total	4	4	13	25	8

The semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded, with the participants' permission. On several occasions a tape-recorder could not be used (including where one was conducted in a custodial setting and permission to bring in a tape-recorder could not be sought in advance); on these occasions detailed notes were made. All of the interviews were transcribed and the tapes, transcripts and interview schedules stored in accordance with the rules of data protection. All the recorded data was anonymised.

The young people who had a semi-structured interview were given an additional £10 high street voucher as a 'thank you'.

Case studies

In nine of the YOT sites a follow-up interview was conducted with one of the young people who had undergone both a structured and a semi-structured interview; in the remaining site no follow-up interview was done because no initial semi-structured interviews had been achieved. The participants were selected on the basis of a broad spread of different housing situations, and range of ages, gender and ethnicity. Selection of the participants also depended on who was still engaged with the service and/or contactable, and also willing to participate. The interviews took place between three to six months after their initial interview.

The interviews were semi-structured and examined how their housing situation might have changed or developed since their initial interviews. In this way, they sought to provide an in-depth picture of the key issues, barriers and areas of good practice as they are lived and experienced by the young people. The participants received a further £10 high street voucher; those who participated in all three stages of the research, therefore, received a total payment of £30.

Stakeholders

Once the research team had got to know the research sites in more detail, key individuals and organisations involved in housing issues in the area were identified. This was limited to housing providers that the individual YOTs had direct links with. This included:

- Public and private sector housing providers

- Specialist housing providers
- Social services
- The local authority Housing Department
- Others identified as relevant, for example those who constituted the Youth Homelessness Strategy Group.

Where more than two individuals or organisations were identified, a focus group was arranged to be held at the local youth offending team. Key individuals from the YOT, such as a named accommodation officer (where there was one) were also invited. Where less than two individuals were identified, or where it was difficult to arrange a focus group with full attendance, semi-structured interviews were conducted instead. These were conducted either over the phone, or where possible, face-to-face. Focus groups were conducted in eight of the YOT sites, and in the remaining two interviews were conducted with one key stakeholder in each.

The focus groups and/or stakeholder interviews sought their views on the particular housing needs of young offenders, and their thoughts about provision both locally and nationally. All of the focus groups were run by two members of the research team, one acting as facilitator and the other as note-taker. Where possible, and with the participants' permission, the focus groups were also tape-recorded. The detailed notes were transcribed and analysed along with the tape recordings. The two semi-structured stakeholder interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Housing provider survey

The lists of housing providers provided by the YOTs were also used to draw a sample of 56 key providers to which a questionnaire survey was sent. This focused on the support and services they provide to young people. Those who attended the focus groups were able to complete their surveys there, while those who did not attend completed their surveys by post. One reminder was sent to all providers from whom a return had not been received.

It is of note that in two of the areas access to accommodation was made through a single point and as a result individual housing providers were not identified or included in the research (I and J in the table below).

The number of completed questionnaires totalled 39 (66 percent of those sent out). At this point the questionnaires that had been returned were examined to ensure their relevance to the research and as a result a number were excluded at this point. This was because they related to the total units of provision available in local authority accommodation (for example 200 to 300 on one return) and were not considered specific enough in terms of the information they provided about young people. Others indicated that the minimum age for entry into the accommodation they provided was 18 years and again these were left out of the final analysis. This reduced the sample to 30 (54 percent of what was requested). This information is outlined in the table below:

Fig 8 – Characteristics of housing provider surveys

Site	Number requested	Number received	Number included in survey
A	6	4	2
B	7	5	4
C	12	7	4
D	12	9	7
E	6	5	5
F	2	2	1
G	3	1	2
H	8	6	5
I	0	0	0
J	0	0	0
Total	56	39	30

National Trend Data

National trend data on the number of young offenders in housing need, and the services that have been made available to them, were collated and analysed. The main source of this was information submitted to the YJB from youth offending teams.

Data Analysis

The final report is based on the data drawn from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the research. The *Asset* data drawn in Phase 1, and data obtained in the structured interviews with young people, were analysed with the dedicated Access database. Any quantitative data were also analysed using SPSS. Chi-square and appropriate non-parametric statistical tests were used to identify significant differences between groups in the sample. For instance, the variable relating to whether or not young people self-reported homelessness during interview was analysed to identify statistical differences in terms of gender and ethnicity. The Access database was also used to store qualitative data from the *Asset* forms, which were subsequently analysed using the qualitative data analysis package Nud*ist 6.

The calendars that were completed during the structured interviews were analysed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data analysis. Data that could be quantified, such as the numbers who had lived in each accommodation type, average numbers of ‘movements’ during the past year, and the numbers reporting not having had their own bed, were analysed using a combination of Microsoft Excel and a manual tally system. Data such as comparisons of offending frequency with accommodation type were analysed manually, again using a combination of tallies and manually picking out recurring themes and patterns.

The data from Phase 2 - the semi-structured interviews with young people – were analysed using Nud*ist 6. This was done thematically, and key points of analysis included young people’s experiences of accessing accommodation when in need, the type and level of support provided to them, and experiences of homelessness. The case studies of young people who completed a follow-up interview were used to further illustrate young peoples’ experiences of housing need.

The transcripts of the stakeholder focus groups and/or semi-structured interviews were analysed manually, with a focus on recurring key themes and issues.

This study made use of a number of different sources of information: national trend data and a thorough literature review, quantitative and qualitative interviews and focus groups with young people and practitioners, and analysis of *Asset* data and Youth Justice Plans. The different sources of data were used to verify each other and where inconsistencies were apparent we have tried to illustrate the varying view points. The triangulation of the different sources and methods resulted in a robustness of research findings, upon which evidence-informed policy can be based.

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