

End Youth Homelessness Cymru presents:

# A Roadmap to Ending Youth Homelessness in Wales



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## Introduction

This document has been drafted in cooperation with members of EYHC's steering group and represents a collaborative approach to ending youth homelessness in Wales. This is a summarised version of a fully referenced and comprehensive paper, which is due to be released in Spring 2021.

The End Youth Homelessness Cymru coalition has been working to identify preventative approaches to youth homelessness for over 3 years now. During that period we've had hundreds of conversations: with young people who have experienced homelessness; with colleagues from dozens of different sectors within Wales; with partners from across the world. These have helped us build a much better picture of the routes into youth homelessness and its triggers. To further develop our knowledge about youth homelessness in Wales, we've delivered some important [research](#), with a particular focus on amplifying the voices of those with lived experience.

From this work, we know much of what works to prevent youth homelessness from happening in the first place, or to ensure that it is a brief and non-recurrent experience where it has not been initially prevented.

We are now bringing that knowledge together, setting out **What We Know** and **What We Should Do About It** in a single, accessible document, from which can be drawn expert, youth-informed and evidenced recommendations to end youth homelessness in Wales. This summary document focusses primarily on proposed actions.

The response to COVID-19 has shown how quickly positions can change. We need to ensure that we are in the best possible position to ensure that the knowledge accumulated throughout EYHC's progress is accessible and ready to be used to influence future policy decisions. There are still gaps in our knowledge, but rather than wait until we know everything (!), we have used this Roadmap to set out the considerable body of knowledge that we currently have in support of proposals for change now and in anticipation that these will drive further learning and better understanding in the future.

## Purpose

The Roadmap is designed to help anyone who is looking to end youth homelessness in Wales, by setting out evidenced approaches that can be used to prevent the issue at an early point, or can help those who have already experienced youth homelessness to leave that period of their lives behind and move on.

This Roadmap is designed to ensure that youth homelessness in Wales becomes rare, brief and non-recurrent.

Specifically what we want from the Roadmap is:

1. We want it to influence a future Welsh Government Youth Homelessness Strategy
2. We want local authorities to be able to use it to examine the services available in their areas and for it to guide commissioning practices to fill in the gaps. This should influence their 5-year homelessness plans and other key documents. Ultimately, every local authority in Wales should have the knowledge from this document to put in place services at each prevention level.
3. We want this to inform the Action Plan being developed as a result of the Welsh Government's Homelessness Action Group (HAG).<sup>1</sup> N.B. there is much crossover with the HAG's recent work, not least due to a shared framework, but we have tried to avoid too much duplication of recommendations and offer a complementary, youth-focussed set of suggested actions.
4. We want existing service providers to see it as a blueprint for effective interventions, to inform service delivery or support funding bids for new projects.
5. We want funders to see this as a guide to what sort of projects they should be funding to move us toward ending youth homelessness.
6. We want young people to be able to look at this document and know that whoever they are, whatever their background, if they are at risk of homelessness they have been considered and an appropriate preventative solution is to be found here.

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government (2020) *The framework of policies, approaches and plans needed to end homelessness in Wales (What ending homelessness in Wales looks like)*. Accessed at: [https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020\\_0.pdf](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-03/homelessness-action-group-report-march-2020_0.pdf)

# Typology

The Roadmap uses a 5-part prevention typology, advanced by Fitzpatrick et al, intended to break down the specific types of intervention required to effectively prevent youth homelessness.<sup>2</sup> As a general rule, to eradicate homelessness, we need to be moving resources further upstream, i.e. toward Universal and Targeted prevention. There will likely always be a need for services which can intervene at the crisis and emergency stages and which can help young people to recover from homelessness, but the greater the focus on the earlier stages of prevention, the fewer people will end up needing those services.



<sup>2</sup> Fitzpatrick, S. Mackie, P., Wood, J. (2021) *Advancing a Five-Level Typology of Homelessness Prevention* Manuscript submitted for publication.

## Universal Prevention

*“I’ve been on the waiting list for 2 years – there are no available properties suitable for me. It’s difficult – I’m a care leaver and my social worker’s struggled (to help me find appropriate housing)” – Participant in Affordable Housing Review response (2019)*

Universal prevention of youth homelessness means preventing or minimising homelessness risks across the population at large. These are the broad, society-wide, approaches to preventing issues that undermine young people’s ability to access and maintain secure, stable and sustainable accommodation.

To achieve effective **Universal Prevention** of youth homelessness we need:

### Poverty Reduction

We know that child poverty and homelessness are closely linked. We also know how poverty experienced later in life holds young people back from moving on from homelessness.

- Welsh Government should introduce a **comprehensive child poverty strategy**, linked to homelessness policy.
- Welsh Government needs to maximise its own Benefits System to prevent youth homelessness, as recommended by the Bevan Foundation, and formalise how a supplemental system can help young people with housing (replacing discretionary benefits with a clearly defined eligibility system).<sup>3</sup>

### Provision of sufficient affordable housing suitable for young people

We know that an undersupply of housing, particularly that built with single, young people in mind, is a key contributor to young people’s housing difficulties and vulnerability to homelessness.

- Wales **should build with young people in mind**. In response to hearing from vulnerably housed and homeless young people in 2019, the Independent Affordable Housing Supply Review panel, acknowledged that young people’s views needed greater consideration, recommending that “...more attention should be given to the requirements of older and younger age groups...(in the collation of Local Housing Market Assessments)”.
- Welsh Government, LAs and other partners should continue to support the development of the **Youth Housing Choices Project**, a unique, youth-focused housing provider designed collaboratively with young people and with youth

<sup>3</sup> Jones, S. (2021) The Case for a Welsh Benefits System. The Bevan Foundation. Accessed at: <https://www.bevanfoundation.org/commentary/case-for-welsh-benefits-system/>

homelessness prevention at heart.<sup>4</sup> This approach is based on effective youth housing associations in Finland and Australia.

## Response to Adverse Childhood Experiences

We know that Adverse Childhood Experiences are firmly linked with increased vulnerability to homelessness later in life.<sup>5</sup>

- We can address the impact that ACEs can have on some people by continuing to promote **trauma informed practice** through commissioning and through the linking of youth homelessness and ACEs strategies.

## Tackling links between Discrimination and Youth Homelessness

We know that discrimination is at the root of some youth homelessness. EYHC's research has focussed, previously, on LGBTQ+ young people's experiences of homelessness, which are often grounded in discrimination and in many cases is the result of being kicked out of home upon coming out to family.

- We can begin to address **discrimination** as a cause of youth homelessness by raising the impact of youth homelessness on groups that face discrimination with their representative bodies and working with them to achieve policy change (see EYHC's work with Stonewall Cymru and other partners, reflected in Out on The Streets<sup>6</sup>, and the forthcoming Welsh Government LGBT Action Plan).

## Targeted Prevention

*"When I was put in hospital, they asked me if I had family to go to. 'No.' 'Do you have anywhere to go?' 'No.' They didn't help me... (They put) nothing, nothing in place... I have no family no friends, nothing. I was (sleeping) in my car". (Bill, aged 17).*

Targeted prevention is upstream prevention focussed on high-risk groups, such as vulnerable young people, and those going through risky transitions, such as leaving local authority care, prison or mental health in-patient treatment. We know that some groups of young people are at greater risk and that the transition between some systems can be a point of danger.

To achieve effective **Targeted Prevention** we need:

- To accept that **some young people are at greater risk of homelessness** and respond accordingly:

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.endyouthhomelessness.cymru/voices/youth-housing-choices>

<sup>5</sup> Grey CNB and Woodfine L. (2019). *Voices of those with lived experiences of homelessness and adversity in Wales: informing prevention and response*. Cardiff: Public Health Wales NHS Trust. Accessed at: <https://phw.nhs.wales/files/aces/voices-of-those-with-lived-experiences-of-homelessness-and-adversity-in-wales-informing-prevention-and-response-2019/>

<sup>6</sup> End Youth Homelessness Cymru (2018) *Out on the Streets: LGBTQ+ Youth Homelessness in Wales*. Cardiff: EYHC Accessed at: <https://bit.ly/3oQcLwI>

- Young people moving between or leaving institutions are often at increased risk of becoming homeless. These include those leaving care, those leaving the secure estate, those leaving or moving between healthcare settings. Young people who are excluded from school, or young refugees are also at greater risk of homelessness.
  - Some other young people are at an increased risk of homelessness because of discrimination, such as LGBTQ+ young people, or because systems are not set up for their specific needs, such as neurodiverse young people, or because they are experiencing poor mental health and cannot access effective help.
  - There is a link between young people who are vulnerable to criminal exploitation and homelessness.
  - Intervention strategies need to recognise intersectionality and the potential multiple barriers a young homeless person can face in accessing services.
- Knowing this, we need to **target our preventative services**, so that they reach those most vulnerable to youth homelessness at the earliest possible point. Targeted approaches that should be available across Wales include:
    - **Upstream Cymru**, a school-based, data-driven and collaborative approach to identifying young people at risk of homelessness earlier, at a point when school re-engagement or family mediation services can have significant impact. The Australian pilot of this approach led to a 40% youth homelessness reduction and initial findings in Wales are encouraging.
    - Effective **transition pathways** with **additional targeted support** as needed, and **Critical Time Interventions**, which can ensure coordination of appropriate services.
      - **Transition pathways**, such as the Care Leavers Accommodation and Support Framework for Wales, are important to support the journeys of young people from institutions to settled accommodation. However, their use needs to be regularly checked to take account of policy change and to ensure that the local authorities and partners delivering them have access to the resources necessary for them to be successful, such as access to appropriate housing so that there is somewhere for someone to be placed, or staff capacity to oversee progress.
      - **Specialist, youth-specific support services** should be included in these pathways.
      - **Critical Time Interventions** offer time limited case management, which coordinate support for people through periods of transition, working to the person's strengths and helping them to establish support networks that work for them. This has seen hugely impressive results abroad (a Danish CTI programme saw a 95% success rate with over 400 people at risk of homelessness<sup>7</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> Fulfilling Lives (2019) *Implementing a Critical Time Intervention Model: Interim Evaluation*. Accessed at: <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/CTI-Interim-Evaluation-Report-WEB.pdf?mtime=20200318171942&focal=none>



- Building on the funding provided by Welsh Government to **maintain and develop Youth Workers' role in youth homelessness prevention**, ongoing investment can ensure that the youth service delivers an additional form of targeted support. Youth workers' relationships, both with young people and a wide range of services, statutory and otherwise, mean that they are ideally placed to identify young people at risk and make appropriate referrals.
- We should end school exclusion, ultimately, but in the meantime, **ensure access to educational re-engagement projects**, which, when operating with schools (and in particular when targeted via Upstream Cymru) offer a superb opportunity to prevent the educational disengagement that can precede family relationship breakdown, which is so commonly a cause of youth homelessness.
- We should make **well-resourced, employment support** widely available across Wales. Examples in Wales include services targeted specifically at care-experienced young people and those known to Youth Justice.

## Crisis Prevention

*Can the services be just for the youth? Because the only services around here are mixed, so we have no choice but to go in with 40-year-old smack heads. I don't mean to put it that way, but that's the way it is" – Dafydd, 20*

This section refers to the prevention of youth homelessness likely to occur within 56 days, in line with Welsh legislation (Housing Act (Wales) 2014) which empowers local authorities to intervene when a household alerts them to the fact that they are threatened with homelessness. Family breakdown is a key cause of young people presenting as homeless at this stage.

To achieve effective **Crisis Prevention** we need:

- **Co-located youth-specific services** in every LA so that young people can get the help they need from one multidisciplinary, youth-focussed team. A good example can be seen in the Vale of Glamorgan, where local authority housing and children's services are co-located with youth-focussed third sector partners, including mediators and advice workers. These services should be accessible for all, with inclusive and welcoming staff trained to understand the needs of diverse groups, including LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse young people. Private spaces should be proactively offered, where young people can have what are inevitably sensitive conversations with staff.
- **Family Mediation** and **educational re-engagement** services need to be available Wales-wide at this prevention stage, as well as at the targeted level, so that those families not previously identified by services are able to access support when they present as in need of help.



- To **end priority need and intentionality testing for young people**, review local connection rules and introduce multi-agency reviews for care-experienced young people upon presentation
- To **end youth evictions into homelessness** from social housing and to develop a system whereby PRS landlords notify local authorities when tenants first show signs of difficulty in making rent payment, so that appropriate support can be offered.

## Emergency Prevention

*“People can’t stay in the night shelter when they are 16 years old... It didn’t leave me traumatised, but if a quiet kid went there and he didn’t know what he was doing it would leave them traumatised. The people there, they are just out of control, they are throwing their life away and I think the people down there are violent too; the drugs that are going around it is all way too much, way too much” (Nick, aged 20).*

To achieve effective **Emergency Prevention** we need:

- To **end use of inappropriate emergency accommodation** for young people, in line with Welsh Government guidance brought in at phase 2 of the homelessness response to COVID and with regard to B&B use for 16 and 17 year olds and care-experienced young people.
- To **increase availability of community hosting** suitable for emergency stays. These short term stays in the homes of trained and vetted members of the community can provide time for support workers to arrange for a young person to stay somewhere on a more settled basis, such as with a family member. This type of accommodation allows local authorities to offer an alternative to inappropriate emergency accommodation such as B&Bs and mixed age hostels. They are currently only available in a few areas of Wales.
- To **maintain provision of the Youth Homelessness helpline and increase promotion** to both young people and services they will be in contact with, including schools (the youngest caller to the helpline last year was 13).

## Recovery Prevention

*“I am 22 now and I have lived in that hostel four times because I have ended up being homeless again, because I have never managed to be stable again” (Carly aged 22).*

Recovery prevention in this context refers to the prevention of repeat youth homelessness, including sofa surfing and rough sleeping, through the provision of sustainable housing and appropriate support. Our aim is for youth homelessness to be rare, brief and non-recurrent; recovery prevention is intended to enable the achievement of that non-recurrence.

To achieve effective **Recovery Prevention** we need:

- To **expand Housing First For Youth** across Wales, building on the learning from 6 pilots currently running here and evaluation of practice elsewhere. The environment in which housing first is delivered needs to be reviewed as part of this expansion, so that we are not allowing our own systems to prevent us from staying true to the model's principles. Notably, we need to see a reconsideration of how homelessness services are funded, to ensure that the open-ended support, crucial to the success of Housing First for Youth, is matched by open-ended funding.
- To prioritise **rapid rehousing into appropriate accommodation**: this should include **youth-specific, psychologically-informed supported housing**, including readily available LGBTQ+ and women's -specific supported housing, as well as **expanding community hosting**, with increased availability of supported lodgings for longer term stays. A useful point raised at our development sessions for this paper was that we need to aim for young people to be "rapidly moved-in, not rapidly moved-on", i.e. that the move to a rapid rehousing approach in Wales needs to be accompanied by increased availability of accommodation that suits young people's needs, where they can settle and develop at their own pace.
- To consider the introduction of **Personalised Budgets** and **Direct Cash Transfers**, where appropriate. Both of these approaches have led to positive outcomes when piloted elsewhere, offering those involved a sense of agency.

## Conclusion

This paper summarises the key approaches promoted in the full Roadmap to Ending Youth Homelessness in Wales. These incorporate policy change and shifts in the environment to make youth homelessness rare, as well as interventions designed to ensure that it is brief and not repeated. It is intentionally loaded with more ideas for targeted prevention than other areas, since by focussing resources further upstream we will eventually see fewer young people needing crisis, emergency or recovery support.

Most of these interventions are available in some areas of Wales and there is a growing body of evidence for their effectiveness here, supported by data demonstrating their impact elsewhere (the recent, positive, evaluation of Housing First for Youth in Scotland<sup>8</sup>, for instance). Some approaches will be relatively novel - Welsh Government's Youth Homelessness Innovation Fund has allowed support providers and local authorities the opportunity to learn about and apply many of

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<sup>8</sup> Blood, I. Alden. S & Quilgars, D. (2020) Rock Trust Housing First for Youth Evaluation Report. Available at: <https://www.rocktrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/HF4Y-Evaluation-Report-July-2020-Final.pdf>

these new approaches in their areas. The learning from these continues, but with young people so badly affected by the economic impact of COVID, with families placed under strain and with housing costs continuing to rise, it is time that we started to ensure the availability of the most promising interventions across Wales.

We know that these approaches should work: they build on progressive, preventative principles; they're well evidenced and informed by partners and young people; they complement existing or planned approaches (notably HAG). But we must see accountability for their delivery. All partners need to hold one another accountable for leaving poor practice behind and focussing on evidence-based, youth-specific, preventative approaches until we finally see an end to youth homelessness in Wales.