

# Difficult Transitions

**How certain experiences put  
young people at particular risk of  
homelessness**

Report for Commonweal Housing

February 2024

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### Introduction

Young people face many challenges in accessing quality, secure, and affordable accommodation. From a lower minimum wage until aged 23 – coupled with high rents, a lack of available property, and a cap on the housing benefit element known as the shared accommodation rate for under 35s – young people who do not have additional support (i.e., from parents or guardians) are disadvantaged in the housing market.

### Research aim

In this already difficult context, this report examines how risk of homelessness is increased for certain groups of young people, and for young people going through particular transitions, for example how being care-experienced, seeking asylum, or being involved with the criminal justice system, can cause and exacerbate experiences of homelessness for young people. We will also consider how protected characteristics intersect with experience of/risk of homelessness, e.g., for young people who are LGBTQ+, from racialized communities, or with poor mental health. For each issue, we will examine the available data to understand its scale and impact and present a summary of the key injustices and complexities young people face.

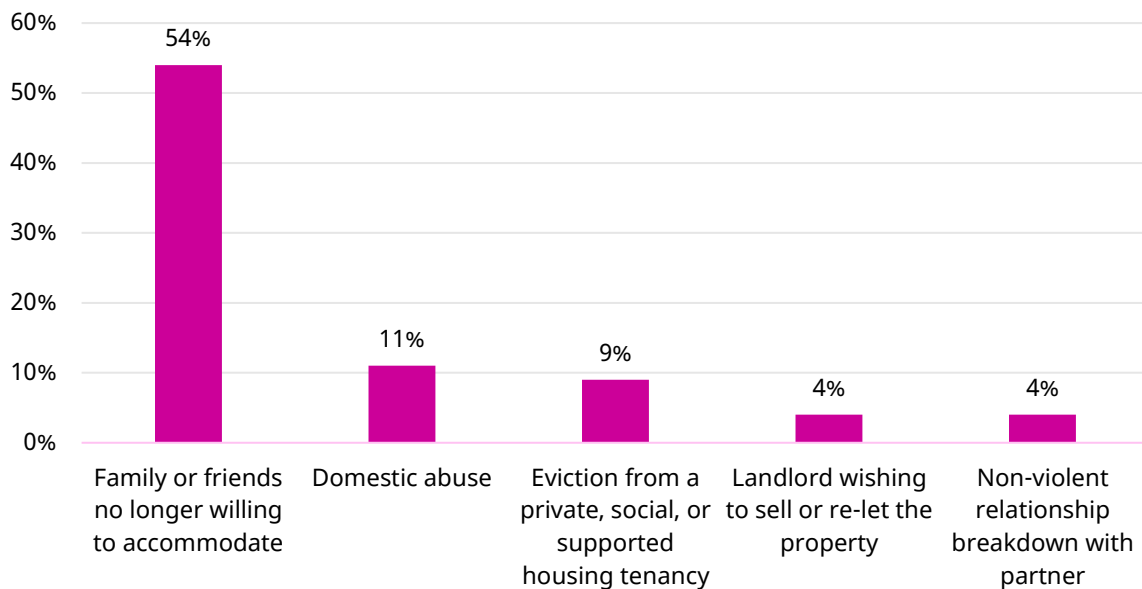
### Context of youth homelessness in the UK

Centrepoin<sup>t</sup>'s databank<sup>1</sup> is the most comprehensive source of data on youth homelessness in the UK. In 2022/23, 135,800 16-24 year olds presented as experiencing homelessness to their local authorities – 1 in 52 young people. Many more will be experiencing homelessness but will not approach their local authority – employing other, often unsafe, methods to avoid rough sleeping including sofa surfing, staying temporarily with friends, or in other insecure housing.

Reasons for young people's experience of homelessness in 2022/23 were as follows in the graph below.

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<sup>1</sup> Centrepoin<sup>t</sup> (2023) Stats and Facts. Available [here](#).



This report will consider the nuance behind the 1 in 52 figure; for some groups and for young people experiencing particular transitions the likelihood of experiencing homelessness is much greater.

### Methodology

This section details the methodology we conducted during this research project.

#### Phase 1: Desk-based research

We undertook a phase of desk-based research to review existing evidence of difficult transitions and their impact on youth homelessness. A full bibliography can be found in the appendix.

#### Phase 2: Focus groups

We held a focus group with Homeless Link's Youth Advisory Panel, with representatives from the following regional and national youth homelessness services:

- St Basil's
- Centrepont
- YMCA England
- 1625 Independent People

In the focus group we sought to understand the broad topics and challenges in the youth homelessness sector, to ensure we did not assume or pre-empt areas of focus.

The second phase also included individual stakeholder interviews with three local organisations:

- Pathways To Independence: A north-London based supported housing provider for young people.
- A south-London based service working with victims of serious youth violence (and with personal experience of being in care).
- Youth Concern: A Buckinghamshire-based youth charity

### **Phase 3: Interviews**

With a steer from the stakeholder interviews and focus group in phase two, and informed by our desk-based research, we interviewed a further four stakeholders in phase three. These stakeholders represented specialist support provision for young people experiencing transitions identified in phase one, or groups of young people identified at particular risk of homelessness.

These stakeholders were representatives from:

- akt: A national LGBTQ+ youth homelessness support charity.
- Switchback: Providing resettlement support to 18-30 prison leavers.
- New Horizons Youth Centre: Open access for young people in London.
- Settle: A charity supporting care experienced young people.

### **Topics outside project scope**

The focus group raised the following areas of challenge in supporting young people at risk of experiencing homelessness. While important context, that have a great impact on a huge number of young people, we will not consider them here as they do not align with the brief of specific transitions or injustices affecting particular groups.

#### **16-and-17-year-olds presenting as experiencing homelessness**

There has been a significant increase in the number of 16 and 17 year olds presenting as experiencing homelessness, and the Children's Commissioner in November 2023 has written authoritatively on the subject.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Lack of housing supply and local authority "gatekeeping"**

The last decade of austerity, cuts to local authority budgets, and a continued lack of house-building have all contributed to major issues in the availability of housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. Stakeholders cited the resulting "gatekeeping" and lack of solutions available from local authorities as a real challenge in obtaining accommodation for young people, but as it does not relate to specific

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<sup>2</sup> Children's Commissioner (2023) Homeless 16- and 17-year olds in need of care. Available [here](#).

injustices or difficult transitions, we will not examine it here. An interesting summary of the issues and further references can be found at Bate (2019).<sup>3</sup>

### **Increased rental prices**

UK private rental prices increased by 6.2% in the 12 months to November 2023, representing the largest annual percentage change since the Office for National Statistics figures began in January 2016.<sup>4</sup> This undoubtedly has had a significant impact on all people who are experiencing homelessness or in housing need, as it pushes more and more properties out of reach of those in receipt of benefits and the local housing allowance rate; but is again an issue that affects everyone rather than specific groups or transitions.

### **Protected characteristics**

This section examines how aspects of a young person's identity or intrinsic qualities can make them additionally vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. These aspects should be considered 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010: sexual orientation, race, and disability. The law is intended to protect people from discrimination with these characteristics when at work, in education, as a consumer, when using public services, when buying or renting property and as a member or guest of a private club or association.<sup>5</sup> However, as we will see there are many occasions and arenas in which young people continue to face discrimination that creates further injustice.

Throughout this report it is worth considering how the challenges a young person experience during situational transitions are compounded by the discrimination they face because of their identity – leading to experiences of overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

### **LGBTQ+**

LGBTQ+ youth are at greater risk of experiencing homelessness. Research by akt (2015) based on a survey of LGBTQ+ youth found that 24% had experienced homelessness.<sup>6</sup> Homeless Link's research found that 8% of people accessing services identified as LGBTQ+.<sup>7</sup> In the UK Census 2021, 3.2% of the population identified as

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<sup>3</sup> Bate, J. (2019) Is the rise of UK homelessness a product of austerity? Available [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK: November 2023. Available [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> HM Government: The Equality Act 2010 available [here](#)

<sup>6</sup> akt (2015) LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response, and Outcome. Available [here](#).

<sup>7</sup> Homeless Link (2022) Young and Homeless 2021. Available [here](#).

LGBTQ+.<sup>8</sup> It is clear homelessness is much higher among this group than their peers who aren't LGBTQ+.

Some of this is due to the inherent vulnerability of relying on others for housing support; akt reports that 50% of LGBTQ+ people feel at risk of eviction due to family discrimination and other factors.<sup>9</sup>

“A majority of the people we support have been asked to leave or are kicked out of the family home due to cultural or religious differences, and sexuality or identity causing tension or conflict or a hostile environment in that house – they’ve been asked to leave or have [had] to leave because it is not welcoming or safe enough”.

– Interviewee (akt)

Research from akt found that once they are experiencing homelessness, LGBTQ+ young people are more likely to face violence, develop substance use issues, and be exposed to sexual exploitation than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.<sup>10</sup>

Schaub et al (2022), writing about the UK but informed mostly by research from the US, state that LGBTQ+ youth are over-represented in the care system and occupy a paradoxical position of being over-represented but also overlooked.

Stakeholders we spoke to had diverging opinions on the availability of suitable supported accommodation. Some felt there was very little available for this group, while others stressed that in their supported housing environments LGBTQ+ young people were well supported and found it easy to form connections, relationships and friendships with peers.

### **Intersection of experience and individual aspects**

It is worth mentioning the additional challenges a young person who is an unaccompanied asylum seeking child as well as LGBTQ+ might face. Stakeholders described the strong support networks provided for unaccompanied asylum seeking children from their cultural or national origin community, many of whom may be less than supportive of a young person's sexuality or gender identity if it is not heteronormative.

Many young people in this situation will not be in touch with specialist providers who understand their gender identity or sexual orientation and will have to face these

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<sup>8</sup> Office for National Statistics (2023) Sexual orientation, England and Wales: Census 2021. Available [here](#).

<sup>9</sup> Bhandal, J., McCluskey, H. (2023) How LGBTQ+ youth are affected by the housing crisis. Available [here](#).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



challenges alone. For those that organisations like akt can help into supportive suitable accommodation, there is a silver lining to eviction from asylum accommodation.

“For people who flee their country for not feeling safe in their sexuality to then spend two years in a place with people that they also don’t feel safe with [asylum accommodation], it’s really nice that once they have access to different types of housing, and can be in a supportive environment, it can start to sink in that they’re somewhere they can relax in and breathe”.

– Interviewee (akt)

It is also alarmingly well-evidenced that there exists an extremely strong link between being LGBTQ+ and experiencing poor mental health.

Stonewall (2018) found that one in eight LGBTQ+ people aged 18 to 24 had attempted to end their life, and almost half of trans people had thought about taking their life.<sup>11</sup>

“Of the young people being asked to leave or kicked out of the family home [because of their sexuality or identity] the majority are black, brown, and people of colour. There are also a lot of crossovers...people have come in from certain religious backgrounds where their mental health hasn’t been looked at, or they would need much more advocacy because they don’t know their rights. They haven’t been able to talk to family about mental health or family haven’t been able to provide that support.”

– Interviewee (akt)

### Neurodiversity and autism

Although the research remains limited, with one peer-reviewed study (Churchard et al., 2019), there is increasing awareness in the sector and among specialist groups of an elevated risk of homelessness for autistic people. Churchard et al. (2019) find that 12% of a sampled population of people experiencing rough sleeping met the diagnostic criteria for autism – a figure that is widely re-used, but more in-depth research is not yet available.

The over-representation of autism, ADHD, other learning difficulties, and neuro-diversity among young people accessing homelessness services was mentioned by a number of stakeholders, raising some interesting issues.

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<sup>11</sup> Stonewall (2018) LGBT in Britain - Health (2018). Available [here](#).

“Of nine residents – seven of them have ADHD, autism, or learning difficulties. The injustice is how difficult it will be to move them on into independent living. There is nothing out there for them. We need to fill the ground between supported housing and independent living – where they can have their own unit but long term support – for nine years or forever.”

- Stakeholder

“In all my years in the sector I’ve never before worked with so many young people who don’t want to leave [supported accommodation], who say “I like people around me, who check in on me, say good morning to me, I am fearful of being alone and what that looks like””.

- Stakeholder

“We had two residents [who were neuro-divergent], who described themselves as socially awkward. They wanted to live together, but the council said, “no, they’re not a couple”. The model has stayed the same – not moved with what I’m seeing among the young people – they want [to share with people they know] and [have] choice over who they live with.”

- Stakeholder

### **Intersection with criminal justice and mental health**

As highlighted by the Children’s Commissioner (2012)<sup>12</sup> there is a shockingly high prevalence of neuro-developmental disorders among young people in custody. For example, rates of learning disability are eight times higher in the secure estate than in the general population, and communication disorders and autism are 13 times more prevalent.

Poor mental health is well established as accompanying neurodiversity – research has found seven in ten autistic people experience mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and OCD.<sup>13</sup>

### **Mental health**

The rapid and concerning growth in childhood mental ill-health (in particular since the COVID-19 pandemic) is well documented, and this can be considered a pressing and emerging issue which will have significant impact on youth homelessness rates in the near future.

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<sup>12</sup> Children’s Commissioner (2012) Nobody made the connection: The prevalence of neurodisability in young people who offend. Available [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> YoungMinds (2021) Autism and Mental Health. Available [here](#).

A significant proportion of lifetime mental health disorders are established during childhood – 50% of lifetime mental health disorders are identified by age 14, and 75% by age 24.<sup>14</sup> A quarter (26%) of young people aged 17 to 19 now have a probable mental health disorder (depression, anxiety, mood disorders, eating problems, psychosis, trauma) up from one in ten (10%) in 2017.<sup>15</sup> 62% of young people experiencing homelessness report mental health problems.<sup>16</sup> This is more than double the already high prevalence in the general population (using 17-19 year olds as an indicative group), with mental health being both a driver and a consequence of homelessness.

These figures are concerning. Action for Children (2023) note that this is a key transition period where young people develop skills and move towards adulthood. Poor mental health can impede young people's ability to engage in education, employment, and other activities that support this transition to independence, which in turn can increase risk of homelessness. Lack of independent living skills, mental health challenges, and employment education and training were the three top support needs identified in the Homeless Link 'Young & Homeless' research (2022).<sup>17</sup>

Around 70% of young people under 25 who receive the main disability benefit – Personal Independence Payment (PIP) – are claiming for mental health and behavioural disabilities.<sup>19</sup> This group face all the additional barriers to securing suitable accommodation that their situation of unemployment entails – they are unable to afford anything but the lowest quality private rented sector accommodation. Challenges in accessing and maintaining accommodation are compounded by poor mental health for example due to increased risk of getting into arrears, relationship breakdown, being vulnerable to exploitation, or going to hospital.

Mental health problems can impact young people's ability to participate in school, which in turn can lead to exclusions. See the section on exclusions for further exploration.

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<sup>14</sup> Action for Children (2023) Breaking through the barriers: How we can build better systems to overcome barriers to work and opportunity, guarantee security, and uphold dignity. Available [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> NHS (2022) Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - wave 3 follow up to the 2017 survey. Available [here](#).

<sup>16</sup> Department of Health and Social Care (2004) National service framework: children, young people and maternity services. Available [here](#).

<sup>17</sup> Homeless Link (2022) Young & Homeless. Available [here](#)

<sup>19</sup> The Institute for Fiscal Studies (2022) The number of new disability benefit claimants has doubled in a year. Available [here](#).

### People of colour

In England in 2020/21 young Black people were over three times more likely to be at risk of or experiencing homelessness compared with young white people.<sup>20</sup>

Research has found that structural racism can also cause complicated transitions through other services, which can cause, exacerbate, and prolong homelessness. For example, young Black men are more likely to be diagnosed with a severe mental illness and sectioned under the Mental Health Act.<sup>21</sup> The difficulties of transition from children and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services (AMHS) as discussed below, and the risks of discharge from hospital further exacerbate the risk of homelessness.

Centrepoin (2019) reported on how young people of colour, particularly but not exclusively men, are also more at risk of falling into gang culture and affiliation than their white counterparts.<sup>22</sup> A recent freedom of information request to the Department for Education, reported in the Big Issue in February 2024,<sup>23</sup> found that in the 2021/2022 academic year, white girls were excluded at a rate of 0.06. That equates to six exclusions for every 10,000 pupils. Black Caribbean girls were excluded at a rate of 0.12, while it was even higher for girls of a mixed white and Black Caribbean background at 0.14.

The Lammy Review (2017) found that despite making up 14% of the population, 41% of young people in custody are from Black, Asian, or minority ethnic backgrounds. This proportion of youth prisoners rose from 25% to 41% in the decade to 2016.<sup>24</sup> This has considerable implications for a group of people who will face barriers to secure housing through their involvement with the criminal justice system before those problems are again compounded further by racial prejudice.

Our research found that young Black men are at particular disadvantage in trying to access the private rented sector as a move-on option from supported accommodation. When asked whether there are any particular groups of young people for whom the

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<sup>20</sup> Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (2021) Duties owed by age and ethnicity 2020-21 (revised). Available [here](#).

<sup>21</sup> NHS (2022) Mental Health Act Statistics, Annual Figures, 2021-22. Available [here](#).

<sup>22</sup> Centrepoin (2019) Escaping the Trap: Supporting homeless young people affected by youth violence and criminal exploitation. Available [here](#).

<sup>23</sup> McRae, I. (2024) 'We're punished for being different': Black girls excluded from school at double rate of white pupils. Available [here](#).

<sup>24</sup> Lammy Review (2017) Lammy review: final report. Available [here](#).

current landscape of housing and homelessness provision isn't working, one stakeholder responded:

“Black males. A 21 year old Black male going to view a flat as private rental is less likely to get it than other young people. The amount of times I've been to a viewing with a young person the [landlord or letting agent] has been like “any drug dealing is not acceptable”. What assumption is that? Is that something you say to everybody? I'll steer people to do viewings online, not to attend in person, to send emails, so that it's not apparent what ethnic division my client is”.

- Stakeholder

### Specific groups by experience

This section considers groups of young people who are particularly at risk of experiencing homelessness or for whom existing housing solutions are failing.

#### Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

In July 2023, the High Court ruled that the Home Office's routine use of hotel accommodation for unaccompanied child asylum seekers in hotels is unlawful.<sup>25</sup>

In 2023, a Children's Commissioner report found a high proportion (15%) of the 6,500 16- and-17-year-olds presenting to their local authority as experiencing homelessness in 2021/22 were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).<sup>23</sup> With 3,762 unaccompanied asylum seeking children's applications for status in the UK in 2021, of whom 78% were aged 16 or 17, the rate of homelessness amongst this group is nearly one in three. In our focus group, Centrepont reported that numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in their services has more than doubled since 2018.

There is concern in the sector that the specialist provision required to support unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people is not available. Experiences of seeking asylum inevitably mean a history of past trauma and extreme adversity, unaccompanied asylum seeking children also may experience language barriers, and challenges around cultural adjustment. Specialist support is required in order to meet these needs. Interviewees raised further concerns that where provision does exist it may reduce with the introduction of new OFSTED regulation requirements for services accommodating 16-17-year-olds who are looked after. Interviewees told us that existing providers delivering specialist support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may be unable or unwilling to register with Ofsted, due to the costs attached

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<sup>25</sup> ECPAT UK v Kent County Council and Secretary of State For The Home Department [2023] EWHC 1953 (Admin) Case available [here](#).

to registering, recruiting, and potentially restructuring, in order to meet the new regulations.

This could cause a dearth of appropriate specialist provision to house unaccompanied children and increases the risk that these children will be placed in accommodation that is not best placed to support their needs, in terms of cultural awareness, knowledge of the immigration system, applications and appeals, or the kind of trauma-informed care unaccompanied asylum seeking children require.

Stakeholders identified that isolation and lack of support networks unaccompanied asylum-seeking children experience increased risk of homelessness:

“They’ve been taken into care and placed all over the UK. When they get to 17, they say “I don’t want to be in [small town/rural area] anymore” – where they experience racism, feel isolated, don’t have a community around them, and they come to London to find that. They say, “I’ll rough sleep in London if I have to”. |

– Stakeholder

This places them at risk of homelessness as they are only entitled to ongoing aftercare from children’s social services, and housing support from the local authority where they have a ‘local connection’.<sup>26</sup>

“They think they’ll get their care transferred to London – obviously that won’t happen. They are opting into being homeless – unbelievably... but it’s better than what they’re coming from.”

– Stakeholder

Further impacting this, young people seeking asylum are not allowed to work until their case is decided.

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<sup>26</sup> Shelter (2023) What is a local connection? Available [here](#).

### Excluded from school and serially excluded

Stakeholders mentioned young people's frequent experiences of exclusion, both from school and as a result of "serial placement breakdowns" in care. Young people who experience exclusion significantly underperform in school exams, are more likely to not be in employment, education, or training (NEET) after schooling at age 19,<sup>27</sup> and are more likely to experience mental illness and self-harm.<sup>28</sup> This has a long-term impact on their ability to establish well paid careers and access private rented accommodation, and can lead to serial social exclusion.

"A large amount of those in the cycle [of repeat homelessness] have come from exclusion units, PRUs [Pupil Referral Units]. Very few have stayed in school; I'm seeing that more now than when I started."

- Supported Housing Manager

"[School exclusions have a] massive impact - we're battling a complete mistrust in professionals where they've not been listened to, heard, or understood, they're coming in to us [as supported housing] with a complete barrier - it'll take three months to tap into before we can even start work on independent living or budgeting or anything like that".

- Supported Housing Manager

Public Health Wales (2019) found that "compared to those who were rarely or never absent from school, those with frequent absences from school were 7.5 times more likely to report lived experience of homelessness".<sup>29</sup> We were unable to find similar research for England or Scotland.

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<sup>27</sup> Department for Education (2019) Timpson Review of School Exclusion. Available [here](#). Cited in Jay, M., et al. (2023) Risk of school exclusion among adolescents receiving social care or special educational needs services: A whole-population administrative data cohort study. Available [here](#).

<sup>28</sup> Parker, C., et al. (2016) The 'supporting kids, avoiding problems' (SKIP) study: Relationships between school exclusion, psychopathology, development and attainment - case control study. Available [here](#).

<sup>29</sup> Public Health Wales (2019) Voices of those with lived experiences of homelessness and adversity in Wales: Informing prevention and response. Available [here](#).

### Care experience

Young people who have been in care are disproportionately represented in homelessness and criminal justice statistics. The largest longitudinal study in England (2023) found that being care-experienced increased the likelihood of involvement with criminal justice system eight-fold.<sup>30</sup>

### Intersectional discrimination

Care experience is one area in which the effects of intersectional discrimination seem particularly stark. The same study found that Black Caribbean and mixed White and Black Caribbean care leavers are 10 times more likely than non-care-experienced young people to be involved with the criminal justice system. Custodial sentences were twice as common among Black and Mixed ethnicity care-experienced children compared to White care-experienced children.<sup>31</sup> The study also found Irish traveller heritage care experience children are 11.5 times more likely than those who had not been in care to have had youth justice involvement, and Roma traveller care experienced children were 12.5 times more likely.<sup>32</sup>

An estimated two thirds of young women aged 16 – 21 in custody have recently been in statutory care, compared to just under half of young men.<sup>33</sup>

Sadly, the likelihood of continued adverse outcomes in adult life is also established. In 2014, Crisis found that 25% of single people experiencing homelessness in the UK had been in care,<sup>34</sup> with reports that almost 25% of the adult prison population have previously been in care.<sup>35</sup>

In this way, being care-experienced can be considered as creating vulnerability or additional injustice in and of itself before we consider the additional difficulties arising at particular transition points.

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<sup>30</sup> Hunter, K., et al. (2023) Care Experience, Ethnicity and Youth Justice Involvement: Key Trends and Policy Implications. Available [here](#).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2018) Young adults in the criminal justice system. Available [here](#).

<sup>34</sup> Crisis (2014) Nations apart? Experiences of single homeless people across Great Britain. Available [here](#).

<sup>35</sup> The Centre for Social Justice (2008) Couldn't Care Less. Available [here](#).



### Transitions

This section will consider the extent to which experiences of poor quality housing or homelessness are the result of specific transitions experienced by young people. It looks at transition from care (being 'looked after' by the local authority), transition from children's to adults' mental health services, transition out of state-provided asylum accommodation, the transition out of the secure estate, and move-on from supported housing.

### Leaving care

A young person can choose to leave care, if their social care team agree, from the age of 16. When a young person turns 18, they must leave the care-based accommodation (unless they opt to stay in foster care until 21).

The size of this vulnerable cohort is increasing – in 2023, 12,200 young people in England aged out of the care system on their 18th birthday. This has increased by 2% since 2022, and by 7% since 2019.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, risk of homelessness is increasing within the cohort. The number of care leavers aged 18 – 20 facing homelessness in 2022/23 rose to 3,710 – a 9% increase from the previous year.<sup>37</sup> This is a 33% rise since 2018, while the comparable figure in the general population rose 11%.<sup>38</sup>

The current levels of homelessness in this cohort mean that nearly one in 10 young people leaving care are homeless in the two years after transition,<sup>39</sup> and it seems the greater risk of homelessness occurs soonest after leaving care.

“The leaving care transition...we know when someone is going to turn 18 years in advance... how can we still not get this right?”

– Focus Group Participant

### Transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services

In addition to the increased risk of homelessness that having poor mental health puts young people at, there is an additional vulnerability around the time of transition between child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the adult equivalent. In a 2012 UK-wide examination of the transition between the two services,

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<sup>36</sup> Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities (2023) Statutory homelessness in England: financial year 2022-23. Available [here](#).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Una, E., Fagg, J. (2023) Care leavers: Number facing homelessness rises by a third. Available [here](#).

<sup>39</sup> N= 18 – 20 year old care leavers last year (a total of 35,872) Department for Education (2023) Children looked after in England including adoptions. Available [here](#)

nearly half of the young people interviewed were in supported accommodation.<sup>40</sup> This is likely due to family breakdown and family being unwilling or unable to accommodate because of the young person's mental ill health, or due to eviction and abandonments caused by their mental ill-health. We were unable to find more recent data, but in comparison to the frequency of homelessness in the general population as described above (1 in 52 or less) points towards an extremely vulnerable cohort.

### Young people evicted from asylum accommodation

Young people seeking asylum are accommodated by the Home Office during their asylum application process. When their application is decided – whether they are granted refugee status or not – they are issued with a 'Notice to Quit' the accommodation. No support is offered to find move-on accommodation. Of course, for the many who are not granted refugee status and have 'No Recourse to Public Funds' there are very few options.

One stakeholder in the Midlands described the experience of being granted refugee status:

"[It's] a bit like being released from custody, it's the similar scenario. There's no real thought. Where are they going to go? They will end up on the streets because they won't be able to navigate their self around".

- Stakeholder

Of all the issues we've explored, this is perhaps the most live and acute. New Horizons Youth Centre described the impact of recent Home Office efforts to clear the backlog of asylum application cases awaiting decision. In late 2023, the centre recorded a 400% increase in the number of new users who were refugees. In the last quarter of 2023, 94 young people were recorded as having been evicted. In the first four days of 2024, 23 young people presented who had been evicted.

"We've never seen anything like it. More than two-thirds are asylum seeking young people. Of 8 – 12 new young people a day presenting as homeless – six, or seven, of eight will have been evicted from NASS [National Asylum Support Service]. Just literally evicted with seven days' notice<sup>41</sup> and they're on the street. They don't know where to go; they have varying levels of English. They've been sat in hotels, none of them had opportunities to work or learn English – many of them could be working or in college [if

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<sup>40</sup> Hovish, K., et al. (2012) Transition experiences of mental health service users, parents, and professionals in the United Kingdom: a qualitative study. Available [here](#).

<sup>41</sup> Right to Remain (2024) Increase in Home Office evictions for those who have refugee status. Available [here](#).

they had], they could be much more equipped, but they've been sat in hotels, restricted, restrained, cramped up, and re-traumatised. Then they're thrown out into the street, in winter."

- Interviewee (New Horizons Youth Centre)

Evidencing the complexities of intersectionality, akt also described this as an emerging trend of particular concern:

"Another big one at the moment is LGBTQI young people who have been claiming asylum and had that granted and are often not served valid notices – really short periods of notice. There's been a massive processing of application over last couple of months – the Home Office has suddenly processed 4,000 applications which has put so much pressure on local authorities, charities...the buck is being passed down the line."

- Interviewee (akt)

A further injustice is emerging.

"[The New Horizons Youth Centre] pay for backpackers (hostels) and hotels at an astonishing rate. But over Christmas we had one backpackers (hostel) saying we're not taking bookings from charities any more. [I suppose] commercial back packers don't want homeless people in their dorms. Homelessness is not a protected characteristic, so I don't know how we'd argue that."

- Head of Service (New Horizons Youth Centre)

## Criminal justice system

### Transition out of custody

Transition points within and from the criminal justice system are fraught for everyone. The problem of release to homelessness and the cycle of reoffending that often ensues is well known. The charity Switchback told us that in 2022/23, two in three men aged 18 – 30 who were released from prison were experiencing homelessness. According to Clinks (cited in Commonweal 2020) the situation is even more complicated for young women:

"This [lack of resettlement support] is made harder for women being released from women's prisons, because as there are fewer prisons, they are more geographically dispersed and further from where they might live or end up. Inappropriate housing or the risk of homelessness can pose a real risk for girls and young women."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Commonweal Housing (2020) Locked Out. Available [here](#).

For young people there are additional pinch points such when they turn 18 years old. One review found:

“Practitioners stated that accommodation problems were particularly difficult when young people became 18 as they were less likely to be viewed as in priority need by the local authority...whereas YOTs [Youth Offending Teams] had a range of options when working with under-18s, probation offender managers [for over-18s] reported that often bed and breakfast was the only realistic option. One YOT manager elsewhere told us “I’ve had staff frantically trying to get young people into supported accommodation before they are 18...even if it’s the day before”<sup>43</sup>.”

Supported housing providers described their own role in creating the catch-22 situation young offenders find themselves in:

“We get a lot of enquiries from probation workers saying a young person is due to be released – but because we can’t hold rooms, they can’t say when they’re going to be released so it’s hard to manage. We would accept someone with a criminal record, but need people to show they’ve changed, e.g., for six months, you can’t know that if someone’s coming straight from prison – so in three years we haven’t taken anyone from prison, no.”

– Supported Housing Provider

Options into the private rented sector are also limited, and difficulties compounded as for other groups and transitions.

“We have complicated experiences with supported accommodation – the price people pay through housing benefit [is high] and the level of support they actually get is quite limited. We have issues if people do want to move into full time work – it’s then really difficult to find somewhere to move on to if they’re no longer getting [housing benefit]. And of course, finding landlords who will accept criminal records.”

– Stakeholder

In early 2023, the Ministry of Justice launched the ‘Crossover Post-Custody Support Programme’, a funding round for voluntary and community sector organisations to provide through-the-gate resettlement support for young people leaving custody.<sup>44</sup> Unfortunately, by July 2023, it was announced the scheme was cancelled before it

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<sup>43</sup> Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2012) Transitions: An inspection of the transitions arrangements from youth to adult services in the criminal justice system. Available [here](#).

<sup>44</sup> Bidstats (2023) Crossover Post-custody Youth Resettlement Programme. Available [here](#).

began, apparently due to “financial pressure”.<sup>45</sup> This could be an area of particular interest for Commonweal, as it is possible voluntary sector organisations were well prepared to launch schemes.

### **Remanded due to lack of suitable accommodation**

A growing problem in the criminal justice system that is disproportionately affecting young people is the lack of suitable accommodation driving increased custody rates for children and young people on remand. Young people are being put in prison where they might otherwise remain in the community and in their homes pending trial, because their accommodation is deemed to be unsuitable.

The House of Commons Justice Committee (2020) found that “children remanded in youth custody accounted for over a quarter (28%) of the average custody population in the latest year, an increase from 24% in the previous year. This is the highest proportion seen in the last 10 years”.<sup>46</sup> The report goes on:

“We sought to understand why the number of children on remand had increased in the latest year for which statistics are available. There appeared to be no single reason. Common themes amongst witness responses included increase in serious violence; lack of credible community alternatives; and limited time to put together alternative bail packages... I hear anecdotally, and a lot from youth offending teams in particular, is that youth offending teams are finding it quite difficult to find suitable and appropriate accommodation in the community to provide a community-based alternative to custody during the remand period. That may be a reflection of changes in the availability of local services and money within local authorities.”

– Colin Allars, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Justice Board<sup>47</sup>

One stakeholder confirmed this and two further risks of unfair additional custody time for young people experiencing homelessness.

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<sup>45</sup> Harle, E. (2023) 'Financial pressure' led to cancellation of MoJ youth custody resettlement programme. Available [here](#).

<sup>46</sup> House of Commons Justice Committee (2020) Children and Young People in Custody (Part 1): Entry into the youth justice system. Available [here](#).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

“The probation service can’t release to home detention if they don’t have a known fixed address to go to, so basically people who would otherwise be released earlier are denied that opportunity – they’re spending extra time in prison when for their rehabilitation it would be better to be in the community. And recall as well, if someone is homeless and not residing at a fixed address...it can be a breach [and they’re sent back to prison for that].”

– Stakeholder

### Supported housing to independent accommodation

Several stakeholders identified the difficult transition young people face moving from supported housing to independent accommodation. This includes the transition from foster care or care homes.

“When I started [in this field] six years ago, local authorities would typically provide a package of six weeks’ support to young people [moving into their own tenancies] to sort out rent accounts, get their benefits transferred so they wouldn’t get into arrears and lose the flat. Local authorities are not able to fulfil this anymore, so within six months [the flats are] used as trap houses...we experience a lot of repeat homelessness because of that.”

– Stakeholder

“There is a systemic, chronic, lack of appropriate housing for young people in London – there is supported accommodation (SA) and PRS (private rented sector) and very little in between. SA is quite generic, and I would say “supported” in inverted commas. We have seen a rise in SA providers popping up offering accommodation, but the support provided is patchy and not a lot. Young people are paying extortionately high support costs to the landlords that we would say doesn’t reflect the level of support given.”

– Stakeholder

“A big issue is that supported accommodation is not providing the support that people need. People don’t come out of the system with any more skills or experience than they went in with. The actual support you can provide is limited by the financials of the contract, and often there isn’t enough money in a contract to actually provide sufficient support”.

– Stakeholder

“The lack of housing for those young people, LAs are obviously struggling –the social housing just isn’t available. So, they’re being held in supported accommodation much longer than they need to be and there’s the impact on their ability to find work because of that or progress when they are ready to”.

– Stakeholder

The lack of appropriate support for this transition leads to additional adverse outcomes for young people who have already experienced homelessness. Either they remain in supported accommodation longer than they need to (being “held up” as described above), or the tenancy they move into is at increased risk of failure and repeat homelessness.

### **Systemic issues: Lack of supply**

The chronic shortage of suitable accommodation affects young people at every difficult transition, and compounds the already complex situations particular groups find themselves in.

A lack of one-bed and studio flats undermines the intended safety net of exemptions to the shared accommodation rate for care leavers, victims of domestic violence, people with mental or physical disabilities (claiming daily living component of PIP), and those moving on from homeless hostels. If there are no one-bed or studios available, young people are forced into shared accommodation. Where this is an inappropriate option, they remain stuck in expensive supported accommodation.

“Young people are getting stuck in supported accommodation. If they do work, they are in the lower ends of the salaries, at best getting national living wage, not even London living wage, and it makes it really difficult for young people to privately rent.”

– Stakeholder

Local authorities often place people in other less central locations where there is supply, or the rents are lower, including in other boroughs and at considerable distance. The impact of this practice on young people who have experienced difficult transitions is evident in this example.

“We got a young person into temporary accommodation in Camden – he had his support network and GP in Camden, sexual health team in Camden, his mental health service. Camden then accommodated him in Sydenham – it’s an hour and a half away. This was a young person with complex needs, neurodiversity, substance use needs, no money. If he had been closer...but he lost the accommodation, he went back home and then ended up in prison.”

– Stakeholder

### Systemic issues: Benefits and work

The minimum and maximum rates of Universal Credit a person under 25 is entitled to are set at 80% of the rates for those over 25.

“One of the biggest concerns for me is...care-experienced young people being expected to move on into independence much quicker than other young people [i.e., starting a tenancy at 18]. If you're under 25 you're not entitled to the same benefits – you're on the lower rate but have all the same outgoings as someone older.”

– Interviewee

Despite the introduction of Universal Credit which intends to always make work pay, we heard from a number of stakeholders that the opposite is true for young people living in supported accommodation. Any income from earnings is quickly outweighed by a higher increase in the element payable by the young person to cover the support element of housing costs.

“[Young people in supported accommodation] are limited in terms of what they can do in work – one shift a week, [any more] makes it completely unaffordable. So, it is inhibiting for young people, they're not doing employment and skills [in supported accommodation] so people are not leaving with any more skills than they would have had [in non-supported accommodation]”.

– Interviewee

“Sometimes [young people in supported housing] are not being supported enough to know their rights or how much they can work. People often just work too much and get into massive amounts of arrears – which will take years to pay off – it's a really bad start to your life in homelessness to have arrears”.

– Interviewee

Another area of injustice for young people who have already experienced homelessness of some kind, who are care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seeking children or young refugees, is access to apprenticeships, the wages of which are set far too low to enable people to rent privately or continue in supported accommodation.

“Apprenticeship salaries are impossible – young people can only do apprenticeships if they are living at home. There's a group of young people for whom formal education didn't work, at a transition where they are having to make big decisions about education, housing, work, and we are having to say to people – you have to prioritise your housing, when they are at an age when everyone else is prioritising education or work.”

– Interviewee



### Other gaps in the landscape of housing provision for young people

We heard that there is insufficient specialist supported accommodation for some groups of young people – those who had been through the asylum system as mentioned above, therapeutic environments for mental health support, for LGBTQ+ young people, young women with experience of domestic violence, young people with complex needs including neurodiversity, and at particular times – e.g., cold weather provision.

#### Specialist supported accommodation

“Supported accommodation is really generic – there are very few specific accommodation types – e.g., therapeutic and supported for mental health, very little for people who identify as LGBTQ, and may have had experiences that mean they would develop better with organisations who understand their story.”

– Stakeholder

“There’s nothing for single young women that’s not a refuge. If they’ve experienced domestic violence or intimate partner violence the only option is a refuge, and they are much stricter and quite limiting – so if you don’t want to go into that there’s nothing.”

– Stakeholder

“For young people with multiple complex needs – neurodiversity, substance misuse, and complex mental health – the only way in is through the council to accommodation that might meet those needs – via priority need into temporary accommodation and into a young people’s pathway. But a lot of times they get moved into adult pathways that are totally inappropriate”.

– Stakeholder

#### Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP)

“There’s no SWEP for young people – they have to be CHAIN-ed [have a CHAIN number, i.e., known to be rough sleeping in London]. We know young people sleep rough differently – they are more hidden. There are not youth specific responses, so young people consistently fall through the gaps.”

– Stakeholder

### Conclusion

Young people in the UK are at risk of homelessness due to family and relationship breakdown, domestic abuse, and eviction. The vast majority of young people face significant challenges accessing affordable and suitable accommodation. In addition, for young people who are LGBTQ+, who have poor mental health, who are Black or from racialized communities, or who have additional learning needs or neuro-diversity, we have seen evidence that transitions into adulthood and into safe and secure accommodation are even more fraught.

There are specific life experiences that make young people more vulnerable to homelessness, including repeat homelessness, and other associated poor outcomes such as involvement with criminal justice system and poor mental health. These life experiences include asylum-seeking, care experience, and being excluded from school.

Increased provision of specialist, psychologically-informed, supported accommodation may help – but we also note that many people will experience a combination of these issues, and that their needs will change over time, so supported accommodation needs to support people holistically with a range of issues and be flexible enough to meet changes in need.

Transition points across different types of accommodation (foster care, secure accommodation, asylum accommodation) and supported accommodation are also challenging for young people and often result in homelessness. Support needs to follow the young person through these transitions, with sufficient lead-in time before the transition and long-term and flexible support afterwards. We have seen that in the current landscape this is rarely the case.

Finally, all of these issues and pinch-points are compounded by systemic issues – challenges in making work pay, particularly in supported accommodation and a lack of suitable and affordable accommodation options.

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### About Homeless Link

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working with people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in England. We aim to develop, inspire, support, and sustain a movement of organisations working together to achieve positive futures for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed.

Representing over 900 organisations across England, we are in a unique position to see both the scale and nature of the tragedy of homelessness. We see the data gaps; the national policy barriers; the constraints of both funding and expertise; the system blocks and attitudinal obstacles. But crucially, we also see – and are instrumental in developing – the positive practice and ‘what works’ solutions.

As an organisation we believe that things can and should be better: not because we are naïve or cut off from reality, but because we have seen and experienced radical positive change in the way systems and services are delivered – and that gives us hope for a different future.

We support our members through research, guidance, and learning, and to promote policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

### What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

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# Let's End Homelessness Together

