

CARE LEAVERS ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR WALES

A Good Practice Guide

sheltercymru.org.uk
Charity no. 515902



Mewn Partneriaeth â
Llywodraeth Cymru
In Partnership with
Welsh Government

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Preparing for the Reality of Housing Options	1
Plan Young People's Accommodation and Support with Them	3
Reduce the Housing Emergency.....	4
Access Housing and Support as Needed	5
Access and successfully manage longer-term move-on and support options	6

INTRODUCTION

This guide outlines good practice examples that can be used to help practitioners implement and assess their schemes against the Care Leavers' Accommodation and Support Framework. This document is intended to be used by practitioners, who wish to learn about other schemes across Wales to help boost good practice on all aspects behind the Framework.

PREPARING FOR THE REALITY OF HOUSING OPTIONS

The **Going It Alone** project raises awareness of the realities of youth homelessness and independent living. This award-winning project is funded by the Welsh Government and Grŵp Cynefin. The project works in partnership with Cartrefi Conwy, North Wales Housing, Conwy County Borough Council and Denbighshire County Council, and delivers a range of education and support programmes across Conwy and Denbighshire.

The project offers flexible, preventative, educational services to young people (up to age 25) within schools, further education, alternative education and other youth provision, and to vulnerable young people such as care leavers and those living in supported accommodation. Projects range from accredited preventative courses for at-risk young people, to one-off skills workshops. In addition, the project can work one-to-one with young people at high risk of homelessness.

One of the project's educational initiatives is its new board game, also called 'Going It Alone', developed by the project in partnership with Grŵp Cynefin, Cartrefi Conwy, North Wales Housing and The Bus Stop Project.

Research found that the interaction of playing a board game was more beneficial to engaging young people in learning than the more obvious route of creating a digital game. Developed by the Young Housing Network, all of whom have experienced homelessness themselves, the bilingual game is available for schools and community groups across Wales to access and use as a learning tool. Gemma Closs-Davies, Going It Alone Project Coordinator, explains: 'Going it Alone' is similar to the Monopoly board game in many ways. You travel around the board and interact depending on what scenario card you pick up. You have four pay days and four bill days throughout the game, and you need to manage your money to ensure you have enough to get you around the board. Other resources have included the original Going It Alone leaflet and signposting card, and the Going It Alone app and website at www.goingitalone.co.uk

Start Smart

Start Smart is a peer mentoring programme in Merseyside, which helps young care leavers get ready to live independently. Developed and run by Barnardo's, the service trains older care leavers to become peer mentors, through an accredited training scheme. These mentors then support younger adolescents as they take their first steps towards independent living. The programme is supplemented by intensive support from staff to develop wider life and social skills.

Shelter Cymru's Resources for Young Care Leavers

Shelter Cymru ³ has numerous resources for young care leavers and for those working with and supporting young care leavers:

Leaving Care & Moving on Booklet – a short booklet for young care leavers that briefly covers topics such as Housing Options, Money Matters, Moving In, Landlord Responsibilities, Tenant Responsibilities and some tips about day-to-day tasks and being happy.

Leaving Home Education – Our Leaving Home Education offer can be delivered in any setting, both in person and virtually and can be adapted to the specific needs of young care leavers. Topics covered can include education that helps young care leavers to understand housing matters, find a home, utilise support mechanisms, understand tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities, understand money matters, incomes and benefits, budgeting, and practical skills for managing their first home. Essentially, it's a package of resources aimed at teaching young people how to find housing and successfully, healthily, and hopefully happily live independently.



Opening Doors Activity Pack – this pack is the basis of Shelter Cymru's education offers. It is available online as a read-alone document. It has also been shortened into online bite-sized YouTube videos to ensure accessibility for all.

Right Track Pack – the Right Track Pack is a Youth Practitioner's Guide to Housing and Homelessness, designed for teachers, tutors, youth workers or anyone working directly with young people in either a paid or voluntary capacity. The pack provides information on a range of housing issues facing young people and can help those working with young people to identify problems and offer solutions. It contains a section specifically to help anyone working with young care leavers.

Accredited Agored Cymru Housing and Homeless Course Level 2 or 3 – the accredited course is similar to the Leaving Home Education Sessions that we run and is based around the Opening Doors Activity Pack. The accredited course however requires a minimum of 10 hours of supported learning and the completion of a work-based booklet evidencing this learning. Upon completion, the learner receives an accreditation and certificate that importantly not only builds confidence and skills but provides the care experienced person with hard evidence of their understanding of housing and homelessness issues. For young people who are entering independent living for the first time, with no previous references to provide landlords with, this accreditation and certificate and help overcome barriers that can prevent young people from accessing housing in the first place.

Shelter Cymru Advice for Young People pages – the Young People online pages have information to prepare young people for leaving care.¹

Preparing for the Reality of Housing Options Good Practice

- Think about how you can harness the experience of other young people to advise and guide care leavers. Often young people learn best from each other, particularly when they are being warned about challenges ahead. Peer training or mentoring, or even a short film made by young people to show others can be very effective
- Close working between housing options, looked after children (LAC) and leaving care teams can help develop staff knowledge and their ability to offer good, realistic advice to care leavers. Having a member of staff from a housing authority or provider located within a leaving care service has proven to be highly effective in a number of authorities
- Foster and residential carers, social workers and independent reviewing officers (IROs) need realistic information about what housing options are available locally so that they can pass this information on to young people
- A good understanding of the data around looked after children and leaving care at a strategic level can improve long-term planning
- Ensure young people have access to accredited training courses on pre-tenancy awareness or life skills. This will allow them to gain additional qualifications or credits towards study courses. Care leavers also need to know where they can go for more tenancy advice after they no longer receive a leaving care service (at age 21 or at 25 for those in education and training), so they may need signposting to mainstream housing options and advice services
- When planning with young people for their individual accommodation options, try to give them choice, but be realistic about what is possible and available in the local area
- When preparing young people for the realities of their housing options work closely alongside foster carers and residential workers. They are likely to know young people very well, dependent on how long the placement has been, and are often the best person to talk to care leavers about the future – but they need up-to-date information to be able to do so

¹ If you have any queries about Shelter Cymru's early prevention resources please email: education@sheltercymru.org.uk

PLAN YOUNG PEOPLE'S ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT WITH THEM

Llamau's Support Services

Llamau is a third sector agency working with young people and women at risk of homelessness across several local authorities in Wales. It has been awarded funding through the Ministry of Justice Local Leadership Integration Fund to deliver an innovative partnership project to address the systems issues for young people leaving prison.

Young people are disproportionately represented in the UK's prison system with a third going on to reoffend at significant social and financial cost. Extensive experience/research underlines how the developmental immaturity of under-25s is compounded by 'adult-based responses' to their behaviours that fail to address interconnected complex needs such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) - shown to significantly increase the risk of health-harming/impulsive behaviours and vulnerability to negative influences that reinforce cycles of offending.

Many young people are released from custody without appropriate accommodation/support networks, reducing the likelihood of the security, engagement and community integration vital to their progress. For example, over 40% of young prison leavers from Cardiff, Vale of Glamorgan and Gwent have accommodation as a need on release, and over 200 young prison leavers per year present to Cardiff Council for help with homelessness - typically at a preventable crisis point. Family Relationship Breakdown remains the main driver of all forms of youth homelessness, with changes to priority-need legislation, welfare reform and negative attitudes of private landlords exacerbating the issue for prison leavers.

The partnership pilots an innovative and flexible suite of targeted trauma-informed interventions that meets the specific needs of young people (18-25) leaving HMP Cardiff/HMP Parc; prioritising those with a local connection to South Wales and Gwent (PCC areas). Provision consists of:

1. Specialist Supported Accommodation:

A dedicated team of Support Workers supports young people to access and settle into a safe, psychologically informed home in which they can develop independent living skills, improve resilience and ultimately reduce their risk of reoffending as they re-integrate into the community. Intensive support for any personal/practical

issues is provided immediately from the day of release; a key juncture for successful engagement.

2. Pre-Release Family Mediation:

Llamau works closely with HMPPS to deliver targeted pre-release family mediation for young people at HMP Cardiff/HMP Parc where there is an identified family conflict which could impact positive resettlement upon release; increasing opportunities for appropriate accommodation and vital supportive networks that prevent reoffending.

Skilled mediators engage with young people and their families within both prison and community settings via shuttle, face-to-face, and virtual means as necessary to identify and resolve the issues that have led to relationship breakdown and the threat of homelessness/inappropriate housing on release. Mediators work with everyone in the family home to identify the causes of conflict from all perspectives, seeking a shared understanding and mutual acceptance of different points of view.

The project's aim is to upskill families with the tools and confidence to resolve conflict and help them access specialist support that enables young people to stay safely in the family home. Where this is not possible due to any safeguarding risk posed to/by the care experienced person, they seek to improve relationships with appropriate family members and facilitate alternative support and accommodation where possible.

3. Multi-Agency Hub

Safer Wales has established a new, inclusive multi-agency support hub in Cardiff for any young prison leaver (including females); coordinating a seamless personalised pathway of services from a central, accessible and psychologically-informed safe space.

Suggested Approaches

Having a housing officer in the leaving care team can make a big difference. They can provide support with up-skilling personal advisers in housing knowledge, as well as giving young people specialist housing advice and helping them to access various housing options. Many housing departments have placed housing officers in leaving care teams as part of their contribution as a 'corporate parent', or have made a 'virtual' arrangement.

- Consider setting up a panel to look at all the cases of young people leaving care. This is also an effective way to promote joint working. Panels usually include staff from leaving care and housing options teams, but could also usefully join up with voluntary sector providers of accommodation and support in the local area
- Provide short-term beds for young people leaving custody. If a longer-term housing and support option is not yet ready for them, they can stay in a supported environment for few days prior to the move

- Involve foster and residential carers and other trusted adults to help young people think about their options and make an informed choice about where they want to live
- Wherever possible, give care leavers the opportunity to try out different types of accommodation before they make their choices, such as supported housing, supported lodgings, a shared flat or their own tenancy etc.

REDUCE THE HOUSING EMERGENCY

In Swansea, the local authority has taken a decision to address pro-actively the use of bed and breakfast accommodation among young people. In order to do this, a lead officer led a multi-agency steering group with representatives from social services, housing, the Youth Offending Service, Barnardo's Cymru, Wallich, Swansea Young Single Homeless Project and Gwalia. Together they devised a more bespoke approach to meeting the support needs of young people at risk of going into bed and breakfast, and to planning alternative provision. This had a significant impact on use of bed and breakfast in terms of stopping young people being placed there, but also changed the way in which bed and breakfast was viewed locally – it was no longer seen as a viable option.

Mediation

Llammau delivers a mediation service across 10 local authorities that are embedded or aligned with statutory youth homelessness prevention services. A good example is the Vale of Glamorgan, where a 'one-stop shop' approach brings Llammau's mediation service together with children's services, housing and Llammau's Jigso service – a housing and welfare rights advice and supported lodgings service. The mediation services work with families and also with young people in care, wherever placement breakdown is a risk.

The model of mediation used is proactive, offering where necessary an immediate response to carers/families, using home visiting – an essential prevention tool in its own right – and more informal negotiation as well as mediation skills. Nationally many young people say that if they had known the realities of leaving home or care early they might have worked harder to get along with their carers/parents/guardians. While always mindful of safeguarding, Llammau provides some pragmatic reality checking in terms of the likely types of accommodation on offer to young people, along with location and affordability challenges. But even when young people cannot stay at home or in care placements, mediation workers try to support more planned moves and importantly to promote on-going positive contact with carers/parents where it's safe to do so. Young people

report that this is a major benefit of mediation, even when they can't stay within the carer or family home.

Where funding and contracts permit, mediation workers will work with younger teenagers, aged 14 – 15. This is reported to be highly effective in stopping crisis homelessness presentations at an older age.

Family group conferencing

Barnardo's Cymru has been commissioned to deliver a family group conferencing (FGC) service in Neath Port Talbot as part of the 'Think Family' partnership. The FGC service brings together family and close friends to attend family meetings where the care needs of an individual child or care experienced person are addressed. The outcome aimed for is to produce a safe and realistic family plan which identifies how extended family and friends can help address the needs of the individual (including accommodation). The plan is reviewed periodically. The service also provides court reports and advocacy for parents, children and young people. The service receives high levels of referrals for 15 and 16-year-olds, and has also worked with 17-year-olds. The service has also worked with vulnerable young parents where the subject of the FGC is their baby or child. Accommodation will often be an important part of the issues raised for young people presenting in adolescence, and there is no reason why an FGC model couldn't be used with older young people.

Suggested Approaches

- If there is no option to use a family group conferencing service or mediation service, do staff in your service have the skills and confidence to mediate and negotiate? If not, there are agencies that offer accredited training on mediation
- Some housing options services have invested in this training. You could consider commissioning training between several different organisations, as these are generic skills that staff in a number of different agencies could make use of
- In 2011 Depaul UK published a useful outline of the benefits of mediation with young people, based on their experience of providing family mediation across several projects in England. This includes a business case for investment based on a detailed cost-benefit analysis and savings to the public purse
- Contingency plans are really helpful as they can help reduce crisis points
- Having a designated information point for early advice and support as laid out in legislation, can help avoid crisis
- Some young offender institutions are allowing young people preparing to leave custody to use Skype to take part in assessment interviews with housing providers
- Care leavers in university or further education colleges will require arrangements to be made for vacation accommodation

ACCESS HOUSING AND SUPPORT AS NEEDED

Digartref Housing Scheme

The Isle of Anglesey County Council developed a menu of accommodation options for young people, including a scheme for those with complex or multiple needs. A seven-bed supported housing scheme is run by Digartref and is located in Llangefni.

The project accepted young people with higher levels of need that would, in the majority of cases, be considered too high for placement within other supported housing provision. Young people's needs include substance misuse and/or offending, mental health problems including self-harm, and extremely challenging behaviours. The service was commissioned in May 2013, and from the outset has involved a multi-agency allocation panel which meets to consider referrals and general sharing of information and good practice on a monthly basis or when a vacancy arises. Agencies represented on the group include children services, housing services, mental health services, youth offending, and probation, with Digartref as the service provider.

Demand for this service has been much higher than initially anticipated, and the referral process must be via one of the statutory agencies mentioned above. The void levels have been negligible, and given the level of challenging needs presented by some of the young people accessing the service, the results achieved within this project are testament to the commitment and dedication of the service provider and the willingness of all partner agencies to work together to ensure the best possible outcomes for these challenging but highly vulnerable young people.

In addition to the seven-bed scheme there is also a cluster of two properties which can be used as a move-on/step-down resource or for a care experienced person who is either of lower risk, may be better suited to a non-shared environment, or may be pregnant.

Torfaen Council's Young Person's Enhanced Support Service Pathway

The Young Person's Enhanced Support Service Pathway is a joint initiative between Torfaen Children and Families Service and Torfaen Housing Support Grant (HSG) Service. The service provides a clear pathway of support that can meet changing needs and allow access to appropriate levels of provision.

This service is available to young people aged 16 to 21 years, who are known to Social Services and are being supported through Torfaen Young People Support Service (TYPSS). This service is available primarily to young people who hold category one, two and three status as defined within the Social Services Well-Being Act 2014.²

The service provides a Pathway that delivers realistic short, mid and long term supported accommodation for the relevant 16+ population within Torfaen. It provides a suite of accommodation and support options to reflect the diverse and complex needs of the care leaver population and adds additional resource for homeless young people where all other options have been exhausted, by working jointly with Housing Support Grant services.

It provides a safe route for 16 year olds, currently accommodated in high cost residential placements or out of county placements, to return to their home borough and ensures that young people are equipped with the appropriate skills required to maintain tenancies in the future and care for themselves appropriately. Some young people cope better in smaller low-key environments than within group settings, large hostels and others will cope better within more dependent and supportive environments, such as foster placements. It was important that Torfaen developed a broad range of service provision in order to meet varied and, often, complex needs.

Torfaen have also been able to utilise ESS to support and assist young people at the 'edge of care' and also young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This has proved invaluable in response to crisis situations.

Partnership working is at the heart of this project and referrals come via a panel (Torfaen Care experienced persons Housing Access Panel) made up of representatives from Torfaen Children and Families Service, (including Torfaen 16+ Team Manager), Torfaen Social Care Commissioning Unit, Torfaen Housing Support Grant Team, Torfaen Housing Access Team, Torfaen Housing Strategy Team and wider partners as deemed necessary, the collective aim has been to develop a flexible and innovative service that delivers a suite of options for young people aged 16+ who may otherwise struggle to be accommodated with the appropriate level of care and support. The model provides a more personalised approach to care and support but also focuses on long term independence and promote choice and control. The principles associated with the delivery of support aim to ensure:

- The service is flexible and based on the assessed needs of the individual
- The service delivered is of a high quality
- The service enhances collaboration between Social Care, Health and Housing by working in partnership

² Welsh Government (2018) Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 Part 6 Code of Practice (Looked After and Accommodated Children (Version 2) Available at: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/part-6-code-of-practice-looked-after-and-accommodated-children.pdf> (Accessed 12 January 2022)

with other agencies to ensure vulnerable young people are aware of and can access the services they may need

Suggested Approaches

- Supported accommodation projects tend to be most effective when they are small and can offer more bespoke support to young people. Larger-scale schemes for young people with minimum to high needs, or schemes for a mix of ages, are usually not as effective in supporting care leavers. Accommodation options that are available to both care leavers and other young people are often good, as they allow young people to mix, and this can be another benefit of joint commissioning
- When departments work closely together to agreed outcomes and shared budgets and management, then accommodation and support pathways for young people are more effective
- When placing care leavers in accommodation or moving them on, it's important to think holistically about their needs and the potential implications of moves on other aspects of the pathway plan, such as education or employment
- Commissioners should encourage providers to partner strategically with the local authority and recognise the added value brought through innovation, additional programmes and flexibility of working
- Young people often talk about the quality of relationships with significant people in their lives, including housing related support workers and personal advisers. The balance of weighting between quality and cost in any tendering process is a matter for commissioners, but lower hourly salaries can equate to a higher staff turnover or fewer skilled or experienced staff

ACCESS AND SUCCESSFULLY MANAGE LONGER-TERM MOVE-ON AND SUPPORT OPTIONS

Crisis Training Toolkit

Crisis has developed a training toolkit aimed at support staff who are working with young people to educate them about living in the private rented sector. The toolkit explains tenants' rights, and clarifies some myths – for example those around eviction and rental increases. It also provides links to other pre-tenancy training programmes.

Suggested Approaches

- Consider the option of shared social housing for care leavers or other young people
- Housing teams are the experts in working with private landlords, and are likely to have a private rented access scheme. Rather than developing a different scheme, try to work with what is already there. This could include taking properties on lease or license, and sub-letting to young people as part of their progression to independence. Be aware of the new tenancy changes in the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 – see the Legal Framework document for more information
- When assisting care leavers to find suitable accommodation, personal advisers are required to make sure that the choice is affordable within the care experienced person's income. It is important that personal advisers help young people to work out how they will continue to pay for their accommodation if they are living in the private rented sector after their housing benefit reduces at age 22 to the level of the shared accommodation rate. Otherwise there is a real risk that care leavers could lose their housing. Many care leavers will no longer have a personal adviser when they are 22, so advanced planning is critical
- Care leavers who experience multiple moves sometimes risk their property being damaged or lost due to them not being in a position to protect or store their possessions. Under Section 93 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, the local authority has a duty to make arrangements to protect or store the property in circumstances where, for example, the care experienced person is ill or unable to afford to pay for storage





sheltercymru.org.uk

Registered charity no. 515902