



**When young people are
affected by homelessness**

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Introduction

Glasgow Homelessness Network consulted with young people (under 25) who have experienced homelessness, asking what are the realities of experiencing homelessness, and what information at school may have helped. Resounding messages from the young people were:

- ☛ Life skills such as budgeting, self-confidence, and cookery, build resilience.
- ☛ Information and awareness raising are most useful before point of crisis.
- ☛ When talking about this subject, a number to contact for further information/help within the school, and outwith school should be provided to pupils.

This section includes a group lesson aimed at tackling myths around homelessness, a case study of a young woman now in her own tenancy, having experienced homelessness while at school, and some online resources for teachers and pupils to access for further information.

Tackling the subject of homelessness

Young people report hearing from people who have 'been there' as most effective. Teachers may want to consider contacting a voluntary organisation such as Glasgow Homelessness Network, who support peer volunteers, who can speak of their experiences to pupils.

In lieu of input from a peer volunteer, teachers may wish to use insight from the young people consulted, who when asked 'what message would you give someone thinking of leaving home?' responded as follows:

- ☛ Make sure it's for the right reasons; I left because I didn't like the rules at home. There are rules everywhere you go anyway.
- ☛ Sometimes getting out of the house is the only option. Just make sure you've got the right information on where to go first.
- ☛ There's less choice about things – like the money you have, having a pet. If you're staying at a friend's you might not have privacy.
- ☛ It can take ages to get your own place. Getting into college can take longer, getting a job can be harder too.
- ☛ There's a lot of prejudice against homeless people. Things like they've all been in jail, or all use drugs and drink.

Lesson: What is homelessness?

The purpose of this lesson is to widen perceptions of homelessness, and provide some facts.

Introduction

Ask the group the following questions, emphasising no need to give a lot of thought to the answers:

Question: How many households presented as homeless in Scotland in 2014-15?

Answer: 35,764. This refers to households, so there maybe more than one person in each household.

Question: How many Households presented as homeless in Glasgow in 2014-15?

Answer: 6,297. That's around 18% of Scotland's homeless presentations are made in Glasgow.

Group work

In small groups look at the following scenarios, asking pupils to decide which are homeless, and the reason for their decision. Assume all individuals are over the age of 16, which is the age that a person can make a homeless application.

Scenario

- ☞ After a fight with his mum, David left his home after midnight, he didn't want to go to any of his friends' homes at that time of night, and so slept in the doorway near his home.
- ☞ He doesn't know if his mum will let him come home again.
- ☞ Andrea's parents have been given an eviction notice for rent arrears. There's thirty days until they are required to leave their home.
- ☞ Paul has been sleeping on his aunt's couch for the past week, because there are too many people living in his mum's house, and he can't concentrate on his studies.
- ☞ Justin has been living in Quarriers emergency accommodation project for the past two weeks.

Conclusions

Each scenario is an example of someone experiencing homelessness.

Shelter Scotland describes the Scottish Government's definition of homelessness as:

Homelessness means not having a home. You don't have to be living on the street to be homeless - even if you have a roof over your head you can still be without a home. This may be because you don't have any rights to stay where you live or your home is unsuitable for you.

You might be homeless if you are:

- ☛ sleeping on the streets
- ☛ staying with friends or family
- ☛ staying in a hostel or bed and breakfast hotel
- ☛ living in overcrowded conditions
- ☛ at risk of violence in your home
- ☛ living in poor conditions that affect your health.
- ☛ living in a house that is not suitable for you because you are sick or disabled.

(scotland.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/advice_topics/homelessness/what_is_homelessness)



Below is further information on each scenario. Teachers may choose to address all scenarios, or focus on one or two that have been of particular interest.

Scenario Further information

David

Over half of all homeless applications in 2014-15 were due to relationship breakdown or being asked to leave. This similarly has been the main cause of homelessness in recent years.

In 2014-15, 45% of homeless applications in Scotland were made by single men. Around half of all homeless households were headed by someone aged under 30.

For David's situation, mediation services could be accessed to help resolve the differences between David and his mum.

Andrea

In Scotland, there is a focus on preventing someone becoming homeless. Part of this process is to consider the issue of homelessness with other issues, for example, having a job, accessing the right benefits, having access to healthcare, having family close by.

In this case, the local council may negotiate with the landlord to help arrange a payment plan.

A household can present as homeless 56 days before leaving their current home. So as Andrea's parents are to leave their home in one month, they do not have to wait until the last day in their home to get help. They can visit their housing association, or local community casework team to start exploring their options.

Paul

Sleeping on the streets is a common perception of what it means to be homeless, however, Paul's situation means he is experiencing homelessness. People sleeping at a friend's or family member's house on a temporary basis means there are a lot of cases hidden homelessness.

Within his own home, all people staying there could be considered homeless, if overcrowding is affecting health.

Justin

Justin has been assessed as homeless, and as a young person, his option outside friends/family, or privately renting, is emergency supported accommodation.

Homeless supported accommodation is different to more settled supported accommodation, the former is likely to be for a shorter time, and someone may progress from the former to the latter on their journey to their own home.

Case study

AO left home before the age of 16, while at school, and has travelled through emergency accommodation and supported accommodation; she has been settled in her own home for over a year.

Question: Do you think it's a good idea that teachers learn how to discuss homelessness with pupils?

AO: 'Yes because teachers don't really know what to say to you, to ask you are you OK? Are there problems at home? Or if young people really need to escape.

They really need to know all about it as it's an important part of life which happens to a lot more young people than folks imagine and teachers don't understand if pupils are running late or they can't get in because they have no money. Especially if you're in supported accommodation where people's sleep patterns are all over the place and they're up all night and you're like always alert in case something kicks off. Since I've moved on it's much better and I get a right good sleep.

I can't remember homelessness being mentioned at school I don't think I heard anyone ever talking about it ever.'

Question: What has been the reality of being homeless for you?

AO:

Leaving home

'Well there were a few times I'd gone back home, I wasn't fully homeless the first few times I had been staying in friends' houses and still trying to go to school.

I basically stayed with a few good friends and stayed with mainly one of them. She used to get me to school, her dad done his best but he was a single parent with three kids and had very little, he was really good feeding me and lending me his bus pass because I was under 16 and couldn't get any money from the government.

I became unwell I got chest infections couldn't breathe and stuff. My mum said to move back in and I said no but had a big fallout with that friend so I had to move. At this time, I left school because I couldn't afford to get there to do 5th and 6th year. It was just too hard being back with my mum and it wasn't working out. There was someone like a social worker, who supported my mum and I who told me my two options were either a homeless place or friends' houses. I thought - I can't live in friends' houses for ever I just need to just do this and I went to the Hamish Allan Centre to present as homeless.'

Emergency accommodation

'The worker at the centre asked me loads of questions, hundreds, they got me that day into emergency supported accommodation. I was scared to begin with because I always thought these places would be full of criminals drinking and taking drugs. On my first day, one of the lassies walked past and I thought she doesn't look that bad, maybe she's just pretending she's nice.

continued . . .

I was attending a course but my sleep pattern was atrocious at the time, because when you're in places like this you don't get much sleep and there's always something happening, because you're staying in a house without your mum or dad. Staff don't say "Don't go out" "Go to your beds" they wouldn't get away with that.'

Settled accommodation and my own home

'I moved to settled supported accommodation after a few months. This place was different because it's for people who have moved on from their point of crisis. I stayed there for three years and have been in my own place for a year. It was good, it helped me move on and do other things. Like I was in Holland for 9 weeks volunteering and learning, I went to college and done lots of other things, and now I'm in my own home. I know I can still come back and get help and advice from the workers in the supported accommodation.'

Question: If I was to introduce you to a young person considering leaving home what would you say to them?

AO:

Be realistic

'If you're leaving because of really serious problems, then you've not got an option, but if you're thinking about it because you hear people get Xboxes or big flat screen TV's it's not like that, its nothing like that, you can hardly go to college because you have to pay your rent because your college bursary doesn't cover that, the lecturers don't give you a break for personal circumstances.'

When you're younger you don't realise how expensive it is to live no one realises how dear it is your rent, council, tax, tv licence, gas or electricity your food and having money to last you till you get paid. My mum and sister helped me with decorating but I meet people who think they're getting a flat and it will all be decorated and going to have this and that just never, never happens.'

Know where to go

'Well if there's been abuse go to the Police/Social Work but make sure you get the right support. Don't just go I want a house, a house a house, don't take the first place offered, remember you'll have to live there, otherwise you'll end up homeless again because you didn't like that house and you end up intentionally homeless.'

There's some people I've met who were young 16/17 just in the door of supported accommodation saying 'where's my house where's my house', and if they got one it would just crumble. That's why staff make sure you're ready to run your own house.'

Coping skills

'Another thing is people don't know how to buy food, with staff help, I've become quite good. I always know my priorities my rent, my phone top up, my fags and my washing up powder. Some people go out and buy stupid things like drink and other stuff before the stuff you need to be worried about like the rent council tax.'

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Teachers need to know the signs

Please tell people homelessness can happen to anyone, you can have all the money and become homeless. You should tell teachers anyone can become homeless, it doesn't matter how rich it can happen, and it can be hidden some people don't want to come into schools saying "it's a nightmare in that house I don't want to live there" they'll just stick it out teachers need to be taught to spot signs all isn't good about home, someone changing from being happy go lucky to being sad, from not being as clean, being distant and withdrawn, being snappy, moody or tired and remember it can happen to anyone.'

Resource

Shelter's online classroom resources:

<http://goo.gl/IJ5Em>

IRISS 2014-15 study - Homelessness: Pathways and Prevention

<http://goo.gl/yWZPBx>

Multiple Exclusion Homelessness research report:

<http://goo.gl/9Z0Yjy>

Glasgow Council - where to go if homeless:

<http://goo.gl/24uxFh>

Glasgow Homelessness Network:
www.ghn.org.uk/

Useful for

Additional learning materials around homelessness, poverty and welfare rights.

A study into how people can become homeless, and some ways that organisations are working to prevent homelessness.

The report carried out in 2013 challenges a number of traditional beliefs around homelessness, and offers insight into the relationship of homelessness with complex issues such as criminal justice, addictions, mental health and leaving care.

Practical advice on where to go if homeless in Glasgow.

A round up of latest statistics, resources, news and learning around homelessness in Glasgow, across Scotland, UK and Europe.

Acknowledgements

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