Trouble at Home
Family conflict, young people and homelessness

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Crisis is the national charity for homeless people. Its aim is to relieve poverty and distress arising from this group’s social, economic and emotional vulnerability. It provides lasting solutions to homelessness.

The organisation works year-round to help vulnerable people through the crisis of homelessness, rebuild their lives, reintegrate into society and live independently. It provides access to support for mental health and addiction problems as well as accommodation and training and employment opportunities.

It develops services and runs them directly or in partnership with groups and agencies across the UK. It also regularly commissions and publishes research to raise awareness about the causes and nature of homelessness, to find innovative and integrated solutions to it and share good practice.
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If homelessness is to be solved, if the solution is to be permanent, then it is not enough to simply move people off the streets. What we need are long-term strategies, strategies that are aimed not at the symptom but at the cause, at the very heart of the problem. *What we need is prevention.*

If we are serious about prevention, where better place to start than with the young. It is often said that the young people of today are the leaders of tomorrow; they are also social workers, soldiers, doctors and nurses. At times they are also homeless people.

For many of the problems of homelessness begin at a young age and housing in the physical sense is only ever part of the answer. Nowhere is this clearer than amongst young homeless people. At least two thirds of young people describe family conflict as the main immediate cause of homelessness. If we are able to find ways of addressing these conflicts and providing advice and support for those involved, then there is no doubt that we will be taking a step in the direction of a lasting solution to homelessness.

The setting up of Connexions, a new youth service, promises a platform for addressing some of the problems. I hope that this useful report will play its part in bringing the changes that young people so urgently need.

Shaks Ghosh  
*Chief Executive, Crisis*
Family conflict and homelessness

Many young people who become homeless do so because of conflicts with their families. It is the main immediate cause of homelessness for at least two thirds and possibly up to 90 per cent of homeless young people. This report examines the causes of such family disputes and the scope for intervening to prevent young people from becoming homeless, or at least to improve the support offered by their family when they do leave home.

Causes of conflicts in homeless young people’s families

Many parents of homeless young people have multiple problems including:

- physical and sexual abuse
- alcohol and drug problems
- mental health problems
- poor parenting skills
- new partners and step-parents leading to disputes with children
- poverty.

Family problems are also related to the young people’s behaviour, including:

- mental health
- aggression and violence
- problems at school
- drug use
- criminal activities
- running away from home.

Homeless young people are drawn largely from the most socially excluded groups.

Good practice in crisis intervention with homeless young people

Agencies working to prevent homelessness among young people provide a wide range of services, including:

- advice and casework
- access to accommodation
- making contact with families
- family mediation
- help to return to home areas
- resettlement support
- joint work with other agencies.

Evidence from agencies, from interviews with homeless young people and from previous research identifies a range of good practice which has been developed. The main features are:

- Identifying clear objectives for work with homeless young people. Outcomes can include a possible return to the family home, tracing lost parents and relatives, reconciliation with family members even if there is no return home, going to stay with other family members or friends who can offer support, even if only temporarily, and securing support from the family for the young person’s independent living.

- Early intervention. Many young people’s problems start at the age of 12 or 13, or even earlier. Support to the family at this stage might prevent problems from escalating.

- Rapid response. Quick intervention, sometimes within a few hours, can save young people from leaving home or being thrown out. If they have already left, action within the first week is more likely to be effective than after a longer time lapse.

- Comprehensive needs assessments. It is vital to assess the full range of the young person’s needs. Simply placing them in a hostel or other temporary accommodation might damage their longer term prospects by drawing them into a homelessness subculture.

- Help to stay at home. Traditionally it has been thought by agencies that homeless young people usually had little prospect of returning to their family home. However, some agencies are now adopting a more interventionist approach which aims to prevent homelessness by helping to resolve or reduce family conflicts. If accommodation is too readily available, young people may rush into it without the necessary independent living skills.

- Family mediation. Agencies providing mediation estimated that it might prove
useful in up to 40 per cent of cases. The most effective model appears to be solution focused brief therapy, which offers short-term work concentrating on resolving practical problems that are causing conflict.

- Where young people cannot stay at home mediation can still help to maintain support networks – except in the minority of cases where there has been an abusive relationship and damage would be done by continuing contact. It is important to avoid labelling young people as homeless and to integrate them into mainstream society.

- Emergency and respite accommodation. Temporary accommodation is often provided in hostels, but in smaller towns and rural areas without hostels it is usually damaging to remove young people from their home area and existing social networks. Alternatives to hostels include staying with other relatives or friends, nightstop schemes which provide a bed in the homes of volunteers, fostering and supported lodgings.

- Inter-agency work. The multiple problems of homeless young people and their families require close inter-agency work to provide them with the range of support they need. Schools have an important role in identifying young people at risk. Social services have wide duties and powers, although they may not be the best agency to work with homeless young people because of the stigma attached to them by parents and young people. Other key agencies include housing departments, youth services, the police, and specialist mental health and substance abuse services.

- Style of work is important in sustaining contact with alienated young people. Drop-in services work better than appointment based systems and a relaxed and informal atmosphere is essential.

- Outcomes. While there is limited information on the outcomes of preventive work, in the most successful projects nearly half of young people living at home and experiencing a family crisis resolved that crisis and 15 per cent of those already homeless returned home.

Longer-term preventive work

Crisis intervention work should be only part of a much wider programme of preventive work, including:

- education in schools on homelessness and leaving home
- extended and improved support for young people leaving care
- family support work from the early years of childhood through to teenage years
- support for young people in sustaining tenancies.

The new national Connexions service for young people offers the opportunity to identify the full range of support services.

As part of this preventive strategy it will be important to identify young people at risk of homelessness. Key risk factors are:

- problems at school including truancy and exclusion
- families where parents have separated or there are step-parents
- disputes in the family related to the presence of a step-parent
- history of physical or sexual abuse
- parents with difficulties such as substance abuse or mental health problems
- poor parenting
- previous contact with other services such as social services, psychiatric services and education social workers
- periods of time in care
- siblings who have been homeless
- leaving home before the age of 16, including running away
- childhood conduct disorders
- criminal activity
- application to the local authority housing department.

Conclusions: the future of preventive work with homeless young people

The report makes 35 detailed recommendations for the development of crisis intervention services for homeless young people.
The role of prevention and crisis intervention
Preventive programmes need to start when children are still young. They should aim to help young people leave home in a planned way, with adequate support.

Where possible, a return home is preferable for homeless young people to staying in a hostel – except where any return would cause further damage to the young person.

Local strategies
Services need to be delivered and planned locally. There will need to be local strategies, as part of the local authority’s homelessness strategy. Key partners in the strategy will be:

- voluntary agencies
- housing departments
- social services
- education services
- youth services
- Connexions
- youth offending teams
- probation services
- health services
- drug and alcohol services
- registered social landlords.

A wide range of services are needed, including long-term preventive programmes, crisis intervention and specialist support. Services need to be accessible and flexible. Voluntary agencies are better equipped to provide such services.

Young people at risk should be identified by the partner agencies listed above. Connexions personal advisers should have a key role in identifying young people at risk.

There is a need for joint protocols between agencies, leading to comprehensive needs assessments and referral to specialist support services.

Crisis intervention by generalist agencies
All agencies providing services should develop preventive services by:

- going through a ‘reality check’ with young people to ensure they understand the difficulties of finding and keeping their own accommodation
- helping young people to consider whether staying at or returning home might be a better option until they are properly prepared for independent living
- referring where necessary to specialist services.

Specialist services
There is a need to develop a national network of family mediation services. The government should fund pilot projects in different types of area over a three year period. Although solution focused brief therapy appears to offer the most effective approach, there should be scope for agencies to bid to run alternative models if they believe they might be more effective. Clear outcome measures should be established and the projects should be evaluated from the beginning of the programme to establish the potential effectiveness of different interventions. If current evidence of their effectiveness is confirmed, a national network of services should be established, with a range of statutory and voluntary funding sources.

The way forward
A substantial minority of young people could be saved from homelessness through earlier intervention to resolve problems with their families. All agencies working with young people have a role to play in preventing homelessness, by providing early warning of risk factors and ensuring there are referral arrangements with homelessness agencies. Agencies providing advice and accommodation can help to ensure that young people’s homelessness is not treated simply as a housing problem, but that all their support needs are assessed, including the prospect of reconciliation with their families. The new Connexions service offers the opportunity to build such local networks of services.

Specialist family mediation services have already, with limited resources, demonstrated great potential and evidence from other countries also points to their success. What is now needed is a pilot scheme to test different approaches and to evaluate the prospects for a national network of family mediation services for young people at risk of homelessness.
Explanatory notes

**Interview quotations**: these are reported verbatim from the interviews with young people. After each quotation, the respondent’s gender – ‘m’ for male and ‘f’ for female – and age are given followed by an abbreviation to denote which sample they were in – ‘a’ for young people currently in contact with an agency, ‘h’ for young people currently staying at a hostel.

**Case studies**: these are also taken from the interviews with young people to illustrate particular types of family problem. We do not record the names of interviewees so we have invented names for them.

**Tables**: percentages in the tables have been rounded so the total may not always exactly equal 100. Where more than one response was possible, this is indicated by * at the foot of the column. Base numbers are given in brackets and have been adjusted to exclude non responses.
Leaving home and homelessness

By the age of 25 two thirds of young people have left their parents’ home and are living independently. Leaving home is normal and does not cause homelessness. However an early and unplanned departure, often following a prolonged period of disputes and other family difficulties, can lead to a young person becoming homeless. This report examines the problems of young people who became homeless after leaving their family home. It investigates:

- the significance of family conflict as a cause of homelessness among young people
- the causes of conflicts that can lead to young people having to leave home
- the scope there is to intervene to prevent the young person becoming homeless, or at least to improve the support offered by their family if they do leave.

In 1996/7, there were 3,552,000 young people aged between 16 and 25 living in their parental home. While 99 per cent of 16 year olds and 93 per cent of 18 year olds live at home, only 34 per cent of 25 year olds do so (Rugg, 1999). Only a small minority become homeless, but most of those who do, experience a degree of social exclusion which severely affects their life prospects.

Leaving home in an early and unplanned way is not an easy option. Two thirds (65 per cent) of the young people we surveyed for this research had slept rough at some stage and four out of ten (42 per cent) reported having to sleep rough immediately after leaving their family home.

Previous research on people sleeping rough has identified a wide range of factors which can lead to a heightened risk of homelessness (Randall and Brown, 1999):

- Disputes with parents and step-parents: 33 per cent of homeless people surveyed in 1999 gave this as one of their reasons for first sleeping rough, increasing to 37 per cent of people aged under 26.
- Experience of physical or sexual abuse: previous surveys have found up to 40 per cent of homeless young people have suffered violence or abuse.
- Time in local authority care: surveys find between a quarter and a third of people sleeping rough have been in local authority care at some stage.
- Lack of qualifications: only 38 per cent of people sleeping rough have any educational qualifications, compared to 66 per cent of the general population.
- School exclusion: 28 per cent of rough sleepers surveyed had been excluded from school.
- Unemployment: 90 per cent or more of homeless people are unemployed.
- Alcohol and drug abuse: between a third and a half of people sleeping rough have alcohol problems and up to 40 per cent of younger homeless people have drug problems.
- Mental health problems: psychiatric tests have found that as many as 60 per cent of people sleeping rough may have mental health problems.
- A combination of mental health, drug and alcohol problems: 36 per cent of people surveyed gave an indication of having multiple problems.
- Contact with the criminal justice system: around half of people sleeping rough have been in prison or a young offenders institution and many have repeated contact with the police and courts.
- Previous service in the armed forces: surveys have found that around a quarter of people sleeping rough have served in the armed forces at some time.
- Marital or relationship breakdown: 13 per cent of the people surveyed gave this as a reason for sleeping rough the first time and nine per cent gave it as the main reason.
- Previous experience of homelessness: 85 per cent of the survey have experienced more than one episode of sleeping rough.
- Lack of a social support network: agencies interviewed identified this as leading to and prolonging homelessness.
● Failure to furnish or maintain a home: agencies giving tenancy support identified this as a warning sign that the tenancy may be failing.

● Debts, especially rent or mortgage arrears: 26 per cent of people surveyed gave arrears or money problems as a reason why they first slept rough and 11 per cent as the main reason.

● Causing nuisance to neighbours: agencies identified this as a symptom of other problems, often linked to mental health and alcohol difficulties, as well as being a cause of eviction.

The 1999 research identified key crisis points which can precipitate homelessness:

● leaving the parental home after arguments
● leaving care without adequate support
● leaving prison
● discharge from the armed forces
● marital or relationship breakdown
● a financial crisis of mounting debts
● eviction from a rented or owned home
● a sharp deterioration in mental health or an increase in alcohol abuse.

The report pointed out that while a range of factors are associated with homelessness, they cannot accurately be described as causes:

“Housing shortages, poverty, unemployment, personal difficulties such as mental health, drug or alcohol problems are sometimes said to be the causes of rough sleeping. However, there are continuing problems of rough sleeping in areas with no housing shortage. Equally, the great majority of people in poverty or with mental health, or substance abuse problems, do not sleep rough. While millions of people will experience one or more of these problems, there are perhaps 2–3,000 people who sleep rough on any one night in England (Randall, 1998). It follows that housing shortages, poverty, mental health and substance abuse problems cannot be said to cause rough sleeping. What can be shown from previous research is that these and other factors . . . are more likely to be found among people sleeping rough and will increase the risk of rough sleeping.”

Homelessness is not simply a problem of housing shortage; it also occurs in areas of housing surplus. Indeed, similar problems are found among young people in many different Western countries, with widely different housing markets.

**Preventing homelessness**

A wide range of services have been developed in this and other countries which aim to prevent youth homelessness – both by long-term work with families and children and by crisis intervention when a young person becomes homeless or is at imminent risk. Based on evidence from a number of countries, Van de Ploeg and Scholte (1997) suggest a classification of these programmes, calling longer term work primary prevention and crisis intervention secondary prevention:

**General primary prevention:**
- general information/advice on parenting
- general family support/parent training.

**Primary prevention targeting at-risk populations:**
- early childhood intervention
- specific family support/parent training
- school based interventions
- special services such as counselling and mentoring
- youth employment programmes
- family, school and community links.

**Secondary prevention:**
- family preservation
- special programmes for young offenders and runaways
- family reunification and after care programmes.

Most Western societies have such secondary prevention programmes targeted at families at imminent risk. They also have a range of primary prevention programmes and this area of policy is under intensive development in this country, for example through the work of the government’s Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2000) and in London by Safe in the City (Safe in the City, 2000; Nistala and Dane, 2000).
Crisis Intervention

This report focuses on one part of the wide spectrum of preventive services: those agencies which intervene when a young person, aged 16–25 who has been living in their family home, is homeless or at imminent risk. For this study, homelessness was defined as sleeping rough or living in short-term, emergency accommodation.

Primary and secondary prevention are not alternatives. Both are necessary parts of a wide spectrum of preventive services. It will be seen that many of the family problems which are associated with young people becoming homeless have their origins early in the families’, indeed the parents’, histories. Early intervention and long-term programmes will be necessary to tackle these deep-rooted problems. But many young people are becoming homeless now and some are likely to do so for the foreseeable future, however effective primary prevention programmes become.

Previous research (Randall and Brown, 1999), found that a high proportion of people sleeping rough have a history of family disputes and breakdown. Two thirds of young people in the survey for that research had slept rough for the first time immediately after leaving their parents’ or foster parents’ home. The report suggested that agencies providing accommodation for young people may too readily assume the breakdown is irretrievable or that, as housing agencies, it is not their responsibility to intervene in family matters. However many young people subsequently wish they had resolved problems with their families. Providing them with accommodation before they are ready for independent living, without any exploration of the prospects for reconciliation, may increase their risks of long-term homelessness.

The report recommended that agencies working with homeless young people should consider family mediation as the first option for all their clients. Although some young people will need emergency or respite accommodation, it recommended that all projects should interview young people to assess the prospects for returning to their families.

Many homeless young people move to cities, particularly to central London. By doing so, they may lose existing social and family ties and replace these with entry into a street homelessness culture. There is a need for the further development of projects which help people to return to their home areas and to ensure they have access to adequate accommodation and support there.

There is, in addition, a need for specialist advice services for young people. Their main requirement may be for help and support, rather than simply advice or access to accommodation. Advice work needs to provide access to detailed casework, advocacy, befriending, mentoring, employment, training, resettlement and family mediation.

The research for this report aimed to identify best practice in crisis intervention services and means of developing services further, so as to achieve a significant impact on preventing homelessness among young people.

The services covered include:

- advice
- support
- family mediation
- access to emergency and respite accommodation
- services which help people to return to their home area.

The research consisted of:

- A review of previous research on young people becoming homeless from their family home and evaluations of services to prevent such homelessness.
- Case studies of 12 organisations providing these services. The case studies consisted of semi-structured interviews with staff in these organisations and a review of their internal statistics and monitoring data.
- Structured interviews with 150 young people who had become homeless after leaving their families because of problems there. There were two sub-samples: 75 young people who were currently receiving help from advice and support services and 75 young hostel residents. Tables presenting the main findings are in Appendix 2. Further details of the two samples can be found in Appendix 3.
Chapter Two of this report examines the extent of youth homelessness which is linked to family conflict and the immediate causes of those disputes.

Chapter Three examines the work of projects which aim to prevent homelessness by providing crisis support and investigates what works best in helping young people to avoid the imminent threat of homelessness.

Chapter Four gives an overview of wider preventive services.

Chapter Five makes recommendations for the future development of preventive services.
2. Family conflict and homelessness

**Family conflict is a major factor in young people's homelessness**

Many young people who leave home at an early age have experienced problems with their family. A survey of young people in Scotland found that 29 per cent of all women and ten per cent of men who left home at 16 did so because of problems there. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of those who left for ‘problem’ reasons subsequently became homeless, compared to between two and seven per cent of those who left for a range of other reasons. Of those who had been homeless, nearly 60 per cent had left their family home because of problems there (Jones, 1995b).

Research in London found that 60 per cent of homeless young people gave rows with parents, or parental violence, as the main reason why they first became homeless. Over half (53 per cent) had run away from home or care before the age of 16, compared with only 10 per cent of a comparison group of local young people (Craig and others, 1996). Case records from 14 youth homelessness projects in London show that, excluding homeless refugees, three quarters (77 per cent) gave family problems as the main reason why they had first left their parents’ home (Centrepoint, 2000).

These problems do not just affect young people today. A survey of elderly homeless people found that over half (58 per cent) had experienced broken or disturbed homes during childhood (Crane, 1997). The problems of many older homeless people started as a result of having to leave their parental home.

Family problems may be under-reported by homeless people. Many of the agencies we interviewed for this study identified family disputes as by far the most important reason for homelessness, affecting as many as 90 per cent of users. One research project concluded that difficulties in relationships with parents were the underlying cause of homelessness for all the 16 and 17 year olds in the study, (Biehal and others, 2000). A survey of international research concluded that “almost without exception runaway and homeless youngsters come from severely disturbed families expressing high levels of child abuse, neglect and family crisis,” (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

The evidence suggests that family conflict is the main immediate cause of homelessness for at least two thirds and possibly up to 90 per cent or more of homeless young people. The next section examines underlying causes of the families’ conflict.

**Causes of conflicts in homeless young people’s families**

**Many parents and children have multiple problems**

Many of the homeless young people we interviewed related long histories of problems lived through by both themselves and their parents. Although each person’s story is different, Angela’s is typical of many.

**Case study: Angela**

Angela first left home aged 11. Both birth parents were living in the family household, together with her three sisters, one brother and her uncle who was sexually abusing her and one of her sisters. Her father had a drink problem and her mother had a drugs habit. She suffered hitting and verbal abuse from both. Their father would not believe his daughters about the uncle’s abuse.

Angela also had problems at school because of dyslexia. She regularly truanted and was excluded from school on several occasions. She left and returned home a number of times over a period of six years, sleeping rough each time she left. She was helped to return at different times by the police, friends, her vicar and godmother, but the problems in the family continued. Social services were in contact with the family but Angela found them no help to her.

**Many problems spring from parents’ behaviour**

As the project staff we interviewed pointed out, in most cases the parents of homeless young people themselves have serious problems. In our survey, 48 per cent of young people reported problems such as abuse, alcohol, drugs or mental health problems of their parents which had caused them to leave. This rose to 55 per cent if verbal abuse is included. A survey in London, which compared homeless young people to those living on local housing estates, found that 68 per cent of the homeless group reported such problems with their parents,
compared to 39 per cent of the young local people (Bruegel and Smith, 1999). These problems not only affect parenting skills, but also make parents less able to cope with the behaviour problems developed by their children. The parents sometimes blame the young people for all of the family’s problems (Biehal and others, 2000).

**Physical abuse**

A survey in London which analysed levels of abuse in detail, found that over half of homeless young people (55 per cent) had experienced medium or high levels of abuse, with over a third in the high category, who were abused severely and repeatedly over a long period of time. By comparison, in a control group of young people in inner-London 18 per cent experienced medium or high abuse, with only five per cent in the high category (Craig and others, 1996).

Another comparative survey had similar findings, with 59 per cent of homeless young people reporting arguments that involved hitting, compared to 22 per cent of other local young people (Bruegel and Smith, 1999).

Research in Europe and America has also identified high levels of abuse in the families of homeless young people (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

Half (49 per cent) of the young people interviewed in our survey had left home at least once because of physical violence in their family home (Appendix 2, table 1). For two thirds of these, the violence had been over a period of at least two years, including a fifth for whom it had been happening for as long as they could remember:

“I used to get boots, plates and cups thrown at me. My mum used to hit me with a shoe on my head.” [m, 25, h]

In some cases there was violence from and between both parents:

“She would hit me if I didn’t do housework and cooking. My dad would know that she had hit us while he was at work, so he’d slap her and they rowed. Sometimes he’d defend her and slap us too and be violent and aggressive.” [f, 24, h]

A small proportion (six per cent) of respondents admitted they themselves had been physically violent in the family home. This included hitting other family members, often siblings:

“I was doing drugs in the house, violent to my youngest sister... She was always going on, I’d lose my temper, throw things.” [m, 16, a]

and destructive behaviour to family property:

“I threw all the tables and chairs about and slashed my dad’s tyres.” [m, 19, a]

This figure may well be an underestimate, since they may be less likely to admit to their own violence. For some, the critical moment which prompted them to leave was when a long history of verbal abuse in the family turned into physical abuse.

“A lot of it was mental stress – ‘you’re no good’. He kept putting me down. Then he raised his hand to me and that was it. Not when you’re 16 and female.” [f, 18, h]

**Sexual abuse**

The true extent of sexual abuse is almost certainly under-reported in many surveys. One study which undertook in-depth interviews – taking on average three hours to complete – found that 42 per cent of young homeless women reported sexual abuse when they were children, against 15 per cent of the housed group. 18 per cent of homeless young men reported such abuse, compared to 8 per cent of the housed group. The perpetrator of the abuse was a family member in a third of the cases for the homeless group and a quarter of the comparison group (Craig and others, 1996).

Seven people in our survey (5 per cent) said sexual abuse had been a reason for leaving their family home (Appendix 2, table 1). There is almost certainly under-reporting here, understandably, in the context of a half hour structured interview. Respondents were later given a prompt list and asked if there were any matters they did not like to talk about with the agency or hostel workers. A further five per cent of the total sample who had not given it as a reason for leaving home, identified sexual abuse as one of the things they preferred not to talk about. All but one of the respondents who said
they had left home because of sexual abuse were women, whereas all but one of those who said they did not want to talk about sexual abuse were men, indicating perhaps that men are less inclined to report sexual abuse than women.

Six of those who reported leaving because of sexual abuse were aged 12 or younger at the time they first left home. Six had been abused by a member of the family household, including four young women who had been abused by their step-fathers.

**Alcohol and drug problems**

Alcohol abuse appears to be twice as likely among parents of homeless young people, with a third (33 per cent) reporting such problems compared to 16 per cent of other local young people (Craig and others, 1996).

Over a quarter (28 per cent) of the young people in our survey had left because of drinking by at least one member of the household (Appendix 2, table 1). In two thirds of households where drinking was a leaving factor, it was a parent’s drinking that had been a problem:

“A lot of it was to do with drink. My mum had a lot of depression – she couldn’t cope. A lot of alcohol abuse by my mum. She was a lone parent and we were all a bit wild, going-mad kids. We didn’t see she needed a bit of help ‘til it was too late.” [m, 23, h]

In some cases where a lone parent was drinking, the respondent had had to take responsibility for running the household, which increased the tensions:

“Due to mum’s drinking problem – it caused tension between us. As I was the eldest girl I was expected to take her place as a mum and do everything, which caused arguments. Her not putting money in the electricity meter because she’d spend it all on drink.” [f, 19, a]

In four out of ten of households where drinking had been a reason for leaving, the young person’s drinking was the problem. Seven people reported two or more family members whose drinking caused them to leave. Almost half (45 per cent) of people leaving homes because of drinking had previous episodes of leaving for the same reason.

Almost a quarter (23 per cent) had left home because of drug-taking – in most cases (three quarters) it was the young person’s own use of drugs. One in ten left homes where both drinking and drug use had been factors:

“Dad was an alcoholic. I was running the house, cooking, cleaning. I was robbing to buy the food. He was spending money on drinking… I was doing well at school, then I got into doing drugs and drinking too.” [m, 24, a]

**Poor parenting**

Craig and others (1996) found that half (52 per cent) of homeless young people had experienced poor parenting, including parental indifference, antipathy, lax supervision and authoritarian discipline. This is compared to a quarter of other local young people who had experienced such problems. Studies of families with these problems have found they often arise in families which are overwhelmed by other emotional and economic problems (Biehal and others, 2000; Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

These family problems can also result in parents regarding their responsibilities towards their children as coming to an end when they reach the age of 16 and asking them to leave (Audit Commission, 1996; Smith and others, 1998).

Agencies interviewed for our research pointed out that the problems they tried to resolve were as much related to poor parenting skills as to bad behaviour by the children, although the two are inextricably linked. Bob is an example of this.

**Case study: Bob**

Bob was 14 when he last left his family home. At the time the other household members were his step-mother, step-brother and two half-brothers. His father had been authoritarian and regularly beating him since he was very young:

“Disobedience, anything that threatened his position. The only way he could keep control was based on fear.”

His father was arrested shortly after Bob’s half-brother was born and his step-mother was unable to cope with the situation:

“She didn’t know how to control anyone, had no authority in the house. The house was just chaos, no...
hierarchy at all. She suffered from nerves. I had no respect for her or her son. My step-brother was throwing his weight around a bit.”

Bob began to show behaviour problems at school:

“I used to be able to answer questions they couldn’t answer. The majority of the female staff felt intimidated. If they annoyed me, it’s the way I got back at them.”

At home, because his step-mother was having difficulties coping, Bob found himself having to take responsibility for his younger brothers. Social services were involved with the family but Bob had not found them helpful:

“I got put on the Child at Risk register, that was all (they did). Mediation was suggested, planned, not executed. They (Social services) can’t do anything. So many situations are unclear – I fit into so many categories, no-one has a clue what to do. Too many departments, none of them talk to each other. I’m just one of thousands of people they haven’t served. They treat every life as a piece of paper.”

New partners and step-parents often lead to family problems

There is extensive research evidence on the problems between young people and step-parents. Smith and others (1998) found that two thirds of homeless young people came from disrupted households where there had been parental breakdown, followed in some cases by new partners, or a period in care for the young person. This compared to only a fifth of other local young people who came from disrupted households. Surveys in Scotland found that at least a quarter of homeless young people had a step-parent, compared to only around four per cent in Scotland as a whole (Jones, 1995b). In London, it has been found that only a quarter of homeless young people lived with two natural parents throughout their childhood, compared to half of local young people. More than a third (38 per cent) had experienced three or more changes in care arrangements before the age of 16 (Craig and others, 1996).

The presence of a step-parent appears to have a major impact on some young people who become homeless:

“In all cases of a step-parent joining the household, either the young person openly resented the presence of the step-parent, or their behaviour had changed with the entry of the step-parent / new partner into the house. The feeling that they were no longer the focus of their parent’s attention, or that someone else was being put first or favoured, was expressed by the majority of young homeless people in this situation….From the accounts of both young people and their birth parent (rarely did a new step-parent agree to be interviewed), household conflict became intense when the parent’s new partner joined the household…. Both young men and young women were more likely to report physical violence against them in disrupted families…. Levels of physical abuse were high affecting more than half the young people from disrupted households.”

(Smith and others, 1998)

The Scottish surveys found that young people with step-parents were more likely to leave home early, with 44 per cent having left by the age of 19, compared with 33 per cent of those with one parent and 27 per cent of those with both parents, indicating that it is the presence of a step-parent, rather than the absence of one of the natural parents, that leads to young people leaving home early. Step-children are also more likely than others to cite family problems as the reason for leaving home (Jones, 1995b).

Many of the agencies we interviewed reported that large numbers of their homeless users came from families where parental relationships had been disrupted. Problems often arose because of a step-parent in the family home. Some young people also spend time moving between separated parents without a settled home. These arrangements then break down, when one or both parents find a new partner and the young person can be left, in effect, without a family home. When new partners are met, some parents give priority to a new relationship over their children, especially if they are aged 16 or more, and are expected to fend for themselves, or if they come into conflict with the new partner. Two sisters we interviewed, Claire and Diane, are an example of this problem.
Case study: Claire and Diane

Claire and Diane are 17 and 16. Their mother had died when they were very young. Their father remarried and had two children with his new wife. Family life was stable and the sisters had a good relationship with their step-mother until their father moved out for a new relationship nine months ago:

“Everything was fine before my dad left. It made it worse because she wasn’t my real mum. She said she couldn’t cope. She was very broken down by him leaving. She said every time she saw us she saw him.”

After he left, their step-mother was struggling financially on income support. She was also unhappy about Claire’s group of friends, two of whom were using drugs, although Claire and her boyfriend were not.

“She was stressed and said we just caused her more worry.”

The sisters moved in with their father and his new partner who had a daughter from a previous relationship. The new partner did not welcome the sisters and was also concerned about their friends’ drug taking. There were frequent arguments between them and also with their father who did not approve of Claire’s boyfriend and thought she was not putting enough effort into her college work. There was also tension between him and his new partner and matters came to a crisis five days before Christmas. He left a message on Claire’s mobile phone telling them to go back to their step-mother’s home as he could no longer have them to live with him:

“I felt hurt and angry that they could do that to me. It left me thinking my dad didn’t want me.”

Their step-mother refused to take them back and contacted a local youth advice agency who found emergency B & B accommodation for them.

In our survey, a third (35 per cent) of respondents had left homes where a step-parent or parent’s partner was living in the family household. A further five people reported problems with their parent’s new partner who was not currently part of the family household. Step-fathers or new male partners were more common (23 per cent) than step-mothers or new female partners (nine per cent) in leavers’ households. A quarter (26 per cent) reported problems with their step-parent as a reason for leaving (Appendix 2, table 1). Usually this was because the new partner was seen as over-controlling and they did not feel supported by their natural parent:

“Disagreements with my mother’s boyfriend – we just couldn’t get on. He was trying to act like my father and I didn’t see it that way. It was about the times I was coming in – I was 19 and he was giving me a ridiculous curfew. My mum took her boyfriend’s side. That was the final straw.”

[m, 22, a]

Poverty

One feature which is common to the great majority of homeless young people is that their parents had low incomes. Poverty is likely to be a contributory factor to some of the other problems outlined here. It certainly makes it more difficult for the family to resolve their difficulties. Poverty can also be a direct cause of disputes, because it can be difficult for the parents to support their children beyond the age of 16 and they may indeed need a financial contribution from them. Agencies reported that arguments can arise over what level of contribution the young person should make.

One in ten of our survey specifically reported problems over money, including arguments about rent contributions, as a reason for their leaving. Lack of money also often emerged as a factor among those who reported disruptive behaviour at school:

“I was stealing and fighting with teachers since I was little. From my mum I wasn’t getting enough love and attention. Not her fault, but when you go to school and the other children have all the things you want, you feel bad and want it. She didn’t understand that. People these days don’t want cheap things, when you’re young and the others have designer clothes. There were only three black people in the school and we all had broken down trainers and handed down clothes.”

[m, 17, h]
Family problems are also caused by the young people’s behaviour

The agencies we interviewed pointed out that homeless young people commonly have a range of other problems including the abuse of drugs and alcohol, violence at home and outside, mental health problems, criminal activity and problems at school. It is not, however, easy to disentangle the extent to which these are causes of, or are caused by, conflicts within the family. In most cases both factors seem to be present. Indeed, as one agency pointed out, in many cases young people may be imitating the chaotic behaviour of their parents. The evidence, however, does suggest that such problems pre-date and contribute to young people’s homelessness, although becoming homeless may worsen some of them.

It is also difficult to assess whether the young people had been told to leave or had themselves decided to do so; the two factors are often present when the conflict has reached a stage that neither side can tolerate. As one agency put it, the range and intensity of problems can become overwhelming. In our survey respondents were evenly divided about whether they had been asked to leave or went of their own accord the first time they had left home (39 per cent each), with a sixth (16 per cent) who thought it had been a mixture of both (Appendix 2, table 8). However people who had left home more than once were more likely to report having left of their own accord the first time (48 per cent) but being asked to leave the last time they had left (52 per cent) (Appendix 2, table 9).

Other research has found that where the family has not been disrupted, the most common reason for young homeless people leaving home was that their parents found their behaviour unacceptable. For young women, the conflict is often over relationships with young men who their parents did not approve of. This was one of the problems for Claire and Diane in the case study (page 13). For young men, the conflict was most often caused by their involvement in criminal activity, often associated with drug use. Agencies reported that parents often rejected their children because they had become involved in drugs and crime, with the two often linked. They said that drug problems are becoming very common, even in small towns and rural areas.

A further cause of conflict is disputes with siblings, sometimes resulting in violence. In many cases parents often made threats of eviction as an attempt to control their children’s behaviour (Smith and others, 1998). Agencies we interviewed reported that at a later stage, many young people in these circumstances recognise that their behaviour had been unacceptable and want to reconcile themselves with their parents.

Almost half (48 per cent) of the young people we interviewed thought in retrospect it was worth making an effort to sort out problems with the family. Some acknowledged they might have done more to help the situation:

“We could have been more helpful towards my mum, done more in the house to help. The housing predicament – nothing was long-term, never settled as the houses we were moved to by the council were in bad condition. So we kept being moved on. If I’d have started working. If I’d have understood my mother’s predicament. I didn’t communicate too well then.” [m, 23, h]

Agencies also said that many homeless young women became pregnant at a young age. However this might often help to reconcile them with their families, especially their mothers. It was suggested by one agency that many mothers of homeless young people may themselves have been homeless in the past. Further research would be necessary to verify whether this might be a potential risk factor.

Mental health

It was reported by agencies that there is an increasing incidence of mental health problems among their users. In one survey nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of homeless young people were diagnosed as having a psychiatric disorder, compared to 25 per cent of comparable young people. The disorders were also longer lasting with three quarters of the homeless group suffering from mental illness for over a year compared to 36 per cent of the other young people. As many as a third of the homeless young people reported a suicide attempt, compared to nine per cent of the local young people (Craig and others, 1996).
Aggression and violence
Research on parental separation has suggested that family conflict may lead to children becoming anxious, aggressive or withdrawn (Biehal and others, 2000). A study which conducted a retrospective diagnosis of childhood conduct disorders estimated that 55 per cent of homeless young people had exhibited such behaviour, compared to 14 per cent of comparative children (Craig and others, 1996).

Other research in Holland found that 86 per cent of homeless young people were involved in delinquent activity but that only 12 per cent had started these activities after they became homeless (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

In our survey, 40 per cent of young people said their own violent or disruptive behaviour at home or school had been a problem. Often this was associated with the separation of their parents:

“My mum and dad separated when I was 12 – I didn’t take it well. I took it badly, hit people all the time. (I was) suspended a lot as I was very, very violent. I threw chairs and tables at the teachers if they said something wrong. I was made to sit at the back of the class.” [m, 22, h]

Problems at school
Agencies we interviewed pointed to the frequency of problems at school among young people who became homeless, which manifested in truancy and school exclusions. Research in London found that over half of homeless young people had been excluded from school (Bruegel and Smith, 1999). Similar levels of absence from school among young homeless people have been found in Europe and America (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

Nearly half (45 per cent) of our survey interviewees cited problems at school as a reason for leaving their family home (Appendix 2, table 1). Over three quarters (79 per cent) of all respondents said they had truanted and half (50 per cent) reported having truanted ‘quite often’ or ‘very often’. Four out of ten (43 per cent) said they had been excluded from school at some stage. A quarter (25 per cent) had been excluded more than once (Appendix 2, table 4).

Not all of those who had truanted or been excluded gave these as reasons for their leaving home. Half those who reported problems at school as a leaving factor mentioned truanting (54 per cent) and a quarter (24 per cent) mentioned exclusion (Appendix 2, table 5). A similar proportion (53 per cent) referred to their own disruptive behaviour at school. Some attributed the problems at school to the pressures they were under at home:

“Behaviour problems. When you are having problems at home, if anyone upsets you the slightest bit you lose your temper. You just want to get away from the pressures of home at school and have fun, but I’d just blow”. [f, 17, h]

Others felt problems at school added to the pressures at home:

“Stressed at school, I was getting into a lot of trouble at school and I was scared to approach my mum because she’d have taken the teachers’ side. I’d have got hit. Basically I ran away at 14 because I was suspended from school and I didn’t dare tell my mum.” [m, 17, h]

A quarter (24 per cent) of those who left because of problems at school reported bullying:

“I was being bullied at school by teachers and other pupils and I was being bullied at home. I couldn’t sleep at night.” [m, 25, h]

Some people admitted to becoming bullies themselves:

“I was in a group that was bullying other kids – to be in the group and avoid getting bullied myself.” [m, 25, h]

A fifth (21 per cent) of those who reported school problems as a reason for leaving had difficulties with school work. Eddie is an example of how such difficulties, combined with other problems, can lead to young people leaving home.

Case study: Eddie
Eddie was dyslexic and had problems reading and writing. He was sent away to special school but thought no-one understood his problems. He felt homesick and developed bulimia. He also became disruptive and was fighting other pupils.
His mother took him out of school, but he did not get on with his step-father whom he found authoritarian.

The arguments at home were exacerbated when he became involved with a group of friends who were drug users and he started to take drugs. His mother was worried about the effect on his younger brother and sister and finally he was asked to leave when he was 15:

“I was terrified. Didn’t know what to do. The only places I had to stay were drug dealers’ places. Then I got into heroin and worse drugs and lived on the streets. Sorry was too late by then.”

When we interviewed Eddie, he had come off heroin and was in contact with an agency providing hostel accommodation and a mediation service. They were currently helping him to make contact with his mother:

“To get my mum talking to me again.”

Often people reported a combination of problems at school:

“I’d skive off, I was cheeky, I’d never do my homework. I was disruptive in class. I’m not too sure why, I’d get angry with the teachers. I started off going to boarding school, a lot of Forces kids went there. I got into a fight and broke a boy’s nose.” [m, 25, h]

Arguments as the trigger for leaving home

The great majority (82 per cent) of the young people we surveyed had left their family home following an argument (Appendix 2, table 1). Four out of five of those who had left following an argument reported there had been similar arguments in the home before. For six out of ten the arguments had been going on for two years or more, including a fifth (19 per cent) who said the arguments had been happening for as long as they could remember. Only three people had left after an argument which was the first of its kind.

Often, people reported an escalation of arguments in which the question of leaving was regularly raised, but then finally acted upon:

“Basically me and my mum wasn’t getting on – in general. We’d argue about anything. About me going out – that was the main one – me clubbing, about music, TV. Whenever we argued she’d say ‘why don’t you just go?’ One day when she said this I did – I just left.” [f, 18, h]

Some respondents in retrospect seemed to regret having left in the heat of the moment and were not sure whether the parent who asked them to leave, had in fact meant it:

“My mum blew it out of all proportion. She asked me to go. I took it in serious at the time but I’m never sure she really did mean me to go. I went to a friend and stayed as long as possible.” [m, 26, a]

Others, however, were in no doubt:

“Father said ‘pack your bags, I don’t want to see you again’. I was so angry I wanted to hit him. I walked out and took my luggage.” [m, 19, h]

Homelessness and social exclusion

The agencies we interviewed pointed out that it is in general the most socially excluded young people who become homeless. 46 per cent of the young people we interviewed had experienced at least one type of institution. A third (32 per cent) had been in care – either in a children’s home or with foster parents or both – and a fifth (21 per cent) had spent time in a young offenders’ institution or prison or both. Ten young people had been in a psychiatric unit, nine had been hospitalised for three months or more and seven had been in a drugs unit (Appendix 2, table 6).

Indeed, the Social Exclusion Unit in describing the life story of a socially excluded young person could well be describing the predicament of many of the young people we interviewed for this research:

“Matthew was eight when his father walked out. His relationship with his mother was fine until his step-father moved in a year later. His step-father was very authoritarian and seemed to enjoy punishing and humiliating him. Matthew endured frequent beatings from his older half-brother ... by secondary school he had problems with reading. He was bullied... he began truanting. He also began taking drugs and getting involved in crime. When he
was 16 his mother (at, he believes, his stepfather’s instigation) kicked him out . . . he went through a series of hostel and B&B accommodation ... He became more heavily involved in drugs, shoplifting and burglary to pay for his drugs” (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000)

This chapter has shown that homeless young people are drawn largely from those groups targeted by other programmes aimed at the socially excluded. The next chapter describes the crisis intervention work of a range of agencies which aim to prevent such young people becoming homeless.
3. Crisis intervention work with homeless young people

A wide range of services

There is a wide variety of services aimed at intervening in family crises in Britain and other Western countries. Many are targeted on children rather than young people, but the principles underlying these interventions are similar across a range of agencies. These services target families in crisis where there is an imminent risk of the child or young person moving out of home. Common features are (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997):

- immediate response by the service agency
- intensive intervention
- home-based services
- time limited and brief intervention
- concrete and clinical services
- a comprehensive approach
- goal-oriented with limited objectives

Appendix 1 gives brief details of the work of twelve agencies in England, some of whose services aim to prevent young people becoming homeless after leaving their family home. The agencies were selected to cover a range of types of work and areas of the country, including cities, small towns and rural areas. The descriptions focus on the crisis intervention aspects of their work identifying specific points of interest in each agency rather than giving a comprehensive description of the full range of their services.

All the agencies work with young people in a flexible, informal and non-directive way. But they vary in the extent to which they believe family mediation is possible or likely to succeed, and in the priority they give to family reconciliation compared with asserting young people’s rights to independent accommodation. Whether agencies are located in cities, smaller towns or rural areas also leads to important differences in how they deliver their services.

In summary, key features of the crisis intervention work of agencies interviewed were:

- Advice and casework: all agencies offer access through an advice service, usually on a drop-in basis. They follow this up with detailed casework, where such help is needed. The advice and casework covers a wide range of problems in addition to accommodation and includes benefits, employment and training, drug, alcohol and mental health problems as well as family reconciliation.

- Access to emergency and longer term accommodation: traditionally, homelessness agencies have seen access to accommodation as their primary function. Emergency accommodation includes hostels, supported lodgings, and foster care. In the longer term, agencies help young people to find stable homes. However, some give more emphasis than others to discouraging young people from seeking independent accommodation before they are able to sustain it.

- Contact with families: all agencies regard it as important that young people should sustain contact with their families, unless that contact is so damaging as to be counter-productive, or is unacceptable to the young person. This support is seen as vital in helping young people to move on successfully to independent living.

- Family mediation: any agencies offer mediation although it varies widely in the intensity of support it can offer. For some it consists of helping young people with informal contacts with their family. Others offer specialist mediation based on professional techniques, such as solution focused brief therapy.

- Returning to a home area: some agencies in city areas, especially central London, offer help for young people to return to their home areas.

- Resettlement support: all agencies recognise that many young people need support to sustain a tenancy if they are re-housed, and that involvement does not stop with a return home or access to other accommodation.

- Joint work with other specialist agencies: all agencies recognise the boundaries of their own expertise and the need for inter-agency work with specialist projects providing more intensive and longer term support.
The work of these agencies largely falls into the category of secondary prevention identified in Chapter 1, that is, crisis intervention work. They also all recognise the need for a wide range of primary prevention work as outlined in Chapter 1.

Good practice in crisis intervention with homeless young people

Evidence from previous research, our case study agencies and our interviews with homeless young people has identified a range of good practice which has been developed in emergency preventive services and points towards future developments.

The following sections examine:

- the aims and objectives of these services
- the need for early intervention
- quick response to crises
- assessing young people’s needs
- the prospects for homeless young people to return to their parents’ homes
- techniques of family mediation
- emergency accommodation
- the role of local authorities
- the role of inter-agency work
- working styles and practices
- alternatives to going home
- outcomes of crisis intervention work
- the need for wider and longer term preventive work with young people.

The aims and objectives of crisis intervention with homeless young people

Some homelessness agencies have a misconception that preventive interventions – such as family mediation – are aimed solely at trying to return young people to their family homes or to keep them there if they have not yet left. In fact, the aims of mediation are considerably more complex than this and focus on the best solutions for the young people themselves.

The starting point is the need for clarity of aims, both within the agency and in how it presents itself to young people and their families. For example, the short-term aims of brief therapy should not be confused with longer term therapeutic goals (Biehal and others, 2000). It has been found that the most common reason for workers feeling ‘stuck’ using short-term therapy is a lack of clear goals (Berg, 1991).

Agencies we interviewed found that important features of goal setting were:

- Clarity that the young person, not their parent, is the client although this does not mean ‘taking their side’ in family disputes.
- Identifying a range of positive potential outcomes for homeless young people. In addition to a return home – where this would be in their best interests – positive outcomes might also include: tracing of lost parents and other relatives; reconciliation with family members even if there is no return to living together; going to stay with other family members or friends who can offer a supportive home, even if only temporarily, and securing support from the family for the young person’s independent living.

Early intervention

Preventive services working with families tend to target those who are already in crisis (Biehal and others, 2000). The need for early intervention has been recognised in recent government guidance, Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (Department of Health, 2000). The agencies we interviewed emphasised the desirability of working with families before they reached the point where a young person left or was thrown out and became homeless. Many thought that problems often started at the age of 12 or 13 and that action at this stage might reduce future problems.

Our survey found evidence that family problems leading to the young person leaving home often started before the age of 16 and escalated over time. Half the young people interviewed (56 per cent) had left their family home at least once before. People with more than one episode of leaving home were asked for details of the first time they had left, as well as the most recent. Recurrent leavers tended to have first left home younger than those who had only left once, with two thirds (66 per cent) having first left before they were 16, compared with a fifth (20 per cent) of once-only leavers (Appendix 2, table 10). They were also more likely to have first left home of their own accord (48 per cent) than
once-only leavers (28 per cent), but also more likely to have been asked to leave on the most recent occasion (52 per cent) than once-only leavers (43 per cent), suggesting an escalation of family conflict since the first time they left (Appendix 2, tables 8 and 9).

This is borne out by an increase in the proportion who reported leaving following an argument, from 67 per cent the first time, to 80 per cent the most recent time. This compares to 65 per cent of once-only leavers who left following an argument (Appendix 2, table 3).

Other reasons for leaving among recurrent leavers also tended to show an increase from the first time they left to the most recent – with the exceptions of problems at school and sexual abuse – which reflects their younger age profile the first time they left. Verbal abuse increased from 52 per cent first time to 64 per cent last time, physical violence from 41 per cent to 48 per cent, problem drinking in the household from 23 per cent to 35 per cent, drug use from 19 per cent to 25 per cent, problems with the police from 20 per cent to 32 per cent and problems with a step-parent from 14 per cent to 23 per cent (Appendix 2, table 2).

While the agencies we interviewed recognised the need to develop earlier intervention, they had not in general developed means of identifying those at risk, ways of engaging them with remedial services, or potential funding for such initiatives. While education in schools and general youth work might help, they do not provide the detailed support that families in crisis are likely to need.

Early intervention involves a wider range of preventive services and inter-agency work. These are discussed later in this chapter. Agencies were clear however, that they were needed in addition to, and not as replacements for, crisis intervention.

Rapid response
A crisis service by its nature requires a rapid response and many of the agencies we interviewed mentioned the importance of this. Young people tended not to approach them until they were in a crisis, after they have already left home. If the young person is still at home, quick intervention may save them from leaving or being thrown out. One agency aims to respond within two hours if a young person calls to say they are in a crisis. If they have already left home, then the earlier the intervention the greater the chance of retrieving the position and possibly helping them to return home.

There is a critical period when intervention can be more effective in helping to secure a return home. Some agencies suggested that action in the first week was more likely to be successful. A review of preventive schemes in Australia also found that interventions were most effective when the young person was still at home, or within the first week of leaving home, although positive outcomes were still possible in the first 12 weeks or even beyond (DFCS, 1998).

Agencies we interviewed pointed out that, traditionally, organisations working with homeless young people tended to give priority to arranging accommodation and benefits. Indeed, some argued that hostel providers have a financial incentive to ensure their beds are full. However some hostels do encourage young people to consider other options such as family mediation or make it a condition of staying in the hostel that they explore such alternatives.

Once in a hostel, young people tend to only meet other hostel residents. They are likely to become detached from their previous social support networks and to become involved in what has been called the homelessness circuit or subculture. It has been argued that young people can then develop an identity as a homeless person which can make resettlement more difficult (Crane and others, 1996).

Needs assessment
Traditionally, the response of some agencies for homeless young people was to give priority to providing temporary accommodation and, if necessary, help with claiming benefits. Only at a later stage might the young person’s support needs be assessed in any detail. Increasingly however, agencies are taking a more holistic view of homeless young people’s needs and making an assessment of these a first priority. Those agencies which do provide crisis intervention services have realised that moving young people into the hostel system might in some circumstances damage, rather than improve, their longer term prospects.
Agencies providing detailed crisis services such as family mediation, emphasised the importance of looking at the full range of the young person’s needs and in particular whether there was a prospect of them staying with their parents or other relatives, or even friends. This was done in the young person’s own best interests, not in any attempt to reduce the pressure on scarce hostel beds.

Assessment of young people’s needs is a developing discipline. The Department of Health has published a Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families (Department of Health, 2000). Although this detailed guidance concerns children rather than young adults and is primarily for use in assessments of children and their families under the Children Act 1989, it is also relevant for agencies dealing with homeless young people. These agencies’ users might well have been in contact with social services who might already have carried out a detailed assessment. Even if they have not, much of the information and advice in the guidance could prove useful to agencies working with young adults.

The multiple needs of many homeless young people means that inter-agency work will be essential in many cases. This is discussed later in the report, but such work will be greatly facilitated by the development of common assessment tools. For example, voluntary and statutory agencies in Birmingham have developed such a model, which includes a confidentiality protocol and it has been found to improve exchange of information.

Common and joint assessments are difficult to develop and implement. The government’s new youth service, Connexions, is planning to develop an assessment tool with a common core and sections related to specific problems. “Its use will allow different agencies to agree how needs can be met either directly or through referral, and encourage a co-ordinated response” (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). This should offer the opportunity for developing better common assessments for homeless young people.

**Staying at home**

In many cases where for example there has been abuse, relationships have irretrievably broken down, or continuing to live in the family home is damaging to the young person, it will not be advisable or even possible for them to return. However, in other cases it will be better in the longer term for the young person to seek reconciliation with their parents and to leave home later in a planned manner.

This interventionist approach differs from that still adopted by many agencies, which tend to believe that if a young person has left home there is little prospect of them returning. They believe that their role is to help young people secure their rights, rather than helping them explore all options in a more interventionist style of work. Some agencies which have worked in this way for many years have now moved towards a more interventionist model. The two models can, with some simplification, be characterised as:

**The rights-based approach:**

- treat the young person as a fully autonomous adult who is entitled to make their own decisions
- respond to demands for services from the young people, rather than seeking them out
- accept their decision to leave the parental home
- provide or secure access to emergency accommodation
- seek to provide access to longer term housing as a ‘homeless person’
- offer support for the young person’s self defined needs
- ensure full take up of welfare benefits
- offer opportunities for education and training, but do not pressurise them if they are not ready to take them up.

**The interventionist approach:**

- treat the young person as in a transitional stage from childhood to adulthood who needs some degree of quasi-parental guidance, or even control
- seek to identify at risk young people at an early stage so as to prevent later problems
- assess all support needs rather than just the presenting problem
- assess all accommodation options, with a preference for a return to the parental or other relative’s home until they are ready to leave in a planned manner
- seek to avoid the necessity for the young person to enter into hostels and being labelled as homeless
work on longer term access to stable housing through normal channels

- help the young person to make a realistic assessment of their options and needs
- actively encourage, or even apply pressure, for engagement in education, training and employment.

These approaches are part of a spectrum rather than polar opposites, and in some cases are a matter of emphasis within agencies. But it was clear from interviews with staff in some of the leading agencies working with homeless young people that there has been an important shift of emphasis in their work towards a style which is more preventive, interventionist and holistic.

Is returning home the best option?

Problems in the family home can sometimes be at least partly resolved to the extent that the young person can return there. Research on the process by which young people leave home has found that, of those who left their parental home because of problems there, 44 per cent returned at a later date (Jones, 1995b).

Nearly half (46 per cent) of the young people we surveyed were aged under 16 at the point they first left. The most common reasons young people gave for their first episode of leaving home were: arguments (66 per cent), verbal abuse (48 per cent), physical violence in the home (38 per cent) and problems at school (36 per cent) (Appendix 2, table 1). In spite of such problems, half the survey (55 per cent) had returned home at least once and four in ten had two or more episodes of leaving home before the last time, suggesting repeat behaviour patterns where intervention may have been helpful (Appendix 2, table 7).

Half those who had left before, gave positive reasons for returning home after the first time they had left. Four out of ten had returned on their own initiative, a fifth had missed their home and a further fifth had been encouraged to return by a parent (Appendix 2, table 14).

Most common among the negative reasons people gave for returning home the first time was they had nowhere else to go (37 per cent). A third (30 per cent) said they were cold, hungry or had been sleeping rough and a slightly lower proportion (28 per cent) said they had been taken home reluctantly by a parent, the police or a social worker (Appendix 2, table 15).

Young people were asked what their feelings were about leaving their family home the last time they had left. The great majority (78 per cent) described negative feelings, including a quarter (26 per cent) who had mixed feelings. Four out of ten (43 per cent) described positive feelings.

Among those who expressed negative feelings, the most common words used were feeling sad or unhappy (23 per cent), distressed or upset (21 per cent), angry (20 per cent) or that they had not wanted to leave (21 per cent) (Appendix 2, table 12).

Half (52 per cent) of those who expressed positive feelings about leaving the last time said they were relieved or glad, a quarter (23 per cent) said they were happy and a fifth (18 per cent) felt free or independent (Appendix 2, table 13).

Half of those who had returned (53 per cent) had received help or support of some kind to return home, most commonly (29 per cent) from a relative, including those who were not necessarily part of the family household they had left. Around a fifth (19 per cent) had been helped to return by other parties, such as friends, teachers or the police. Although a third (35 per cent) of households were in contact with social services at the time people had first left their home, only eight per cent (seven people) reported having help from a social worker to return (Appendix 2, table 16).

On their return, a fifth reported that home life appeared to stabilise, that they were welcomed back, or that in some other way they had felt positive about it. A further 38 per cent found relationships improved for a period of time before the problems which had prompted them to leave re-emerged (Appendix 2, table 17):

"Everything was fine for quite some time, then I went back to the way I was – being naughty." [f, 18, h]

However, a similar proportion (39 per cent) returned to the same problems almost immediately, or to a hostile atmosphere, or left again shortly after returning:
“It was like I’d never left – dad coming home drunk, fighting with my mum. Sometimes I got a crack off him if he was in a bad mood.”

[m, 24, h]

Around half (49 per cent) of the interviewees reported that someone had tried to resolve the difficulties in the family the last time they had left home – most commonly their mother (30 per cent) and other relatives who were not members of the household (27 per cent). However, three quarters of these (79 per cent) said that the help given had no effect.

We asked whether anything at all might have helped to resolve the problems in the family household so that they did not have to leave the last time. Four out of ten (43 per cent) thought something, either definitely or possibly, would have helped. Most responses (86 per cent) tended to focus on behavioural change, either by the respondent or a parent. A quarter (28 per cent) mentioned some form of support would have helped.

It is possible that an even higher proportion might have retrieved relationships with their family if help had been available at an earlier stage. This is perhaps illustrated by the responses when young people were asked what advice they would give to someone else facing similar problems to their own, which resulted in leaving their home. Two thirds of them in one way or another recommended making every effort to resolve the difficulties with their family. Over half (54 per cent) of respondents suggested getting help of some kind, including 13 per cent who specifically mentioned contacting the agency currently helping them (Appendix 2, table 19). More often, people suggested finding someone known to them whom they could trust:

“First, don’t just run away. Go to someone who could help you – maybe a teacher or a friend or a friend’s parents and explain the situation to them and see what they’ve got to say about it.”

[m, 24, h]

Almost half (47 per cent) said they would advise making an effort to sort out the problems rather than leave:

“Try and sort it out, ’cos you really don’t want to move. You’re more secure with your family. If someone had come in and shown me all of it – what I’d be up against, I wouldn’t have gone. A trial period away from home – say a month – it would teach people what it’s like. It’s not a bed of roses.”

[f, 17, h]

With hindsight, some recommended continuing to talk to family members and keeping a positive attitude:

“I’d tell them not to stop talking to your mum, whatever the differences you have, she’s still your mum and you’re her daughter. Stop looking to the bad things and blaming everyone, otherwise you won’t get anywhere. Keep a positive attitude and seek help for what you’re going through.”

[f, 18, h]

Those who would advise sorting it out included a fifth (19 per cent) who said they would recommend doing whatever was necessary to stay, while recognising they had been unable to do so themselves:

“Not to go off into the deep end. Swallow your pride, apologise, do as you’re told. But I couldn’t do that myself, at the time, I was only 16. I only saw it from my point of view at the time.”

[m, 22, h]

A third (36 per cent) acknowledged that for some, leaving might be the best option. This group included a fifth who recommended finding accommodation or having a clear plan. Some would urge people to think carefully about it first:

“Make your own decisions, don’t let anyone influence you. Look at why, how, what can put it back together, to rekindle with your family. Think about why and what’s gone wrong and how long it will stay that way. Be realistic. You may make yourself ill if you stay. It may never get better.”

[m, 21, h]

A minority (15 per cent) thought they would emphasise the advantages of achieving independence.

Mediation agencies pointed out that there are a number of reasons why it is essential to explore actively with the young person the prospects of staying with their parents or returning there:
● The younger people are the more likely it is they would be better supported living with their parents, unless it would be damaging for them to remain there. We have seen that 99 per cent of 16 year olds and 93 per cent of 18 year olds live with their parents (Rugg, 1999). Unless there are over-riding reasons to leave earlier, a planned move after the age of 18 or 19 is more likely to result in a stable home and continuing family support network for the young person.

● Many have unrealistic expectations of their housing options. Many agencies carry out a ‘reality check’ with young people, going over the actual accommodation available to them and the rents they would have to pay and the other costs of independent living. This alone can be enough to persuade some to take a more planned approach to leaving home. If there are problems at home, they can then be realistically discussed.

● If accommodation is readily available, young people may be tempted to take it without having the necessary independent living skills. The tenancy may fail and they may return to a hostel, starting a cycle of homelessness that can persist for years. Some agencies pointed out that it is not helpful for local authorities and voluntary organisations simply to accept young people as homeless and house them, without assessing whether this is the best option for them at that point and ensuring that adequate support is available. This will become even more important if the planned homelessness legislation classifies 16 to 18 year olds as being in priority need and therefore entitled to accommodation.

● Young people often do not like to admit to their parents – or perhaps even to themselves – that they would like to go back, for fear of loss of face or a further rejection. Mediators can help young people to make this contact, or can do it on their behalf.

Although three quarters (76 per cent) of people in our survey were still in contact with at least one member of the family household they had last left, less than a third (30 per cent) said they had wanted to return home or were thinking about returning. A further 17 per cent said they would consider returning home in future, although two thirds of these said they would do so for only a limited period of time. It would therefore seem that around half of the young people would consider a return home at some stage and this proportion might increase with further guidance from agencies. Only a sixth (16 per cent) said they wanted help to make or remain in contact with their family, although half (51 per cent) said they wanted help to improve relationships with family members, even if they did not return to live in the family home. 14 people (nine per cent) were currently receiving help to make contact, all but two of these were clients of agencies providing support services. Usually, the help took the form of talking with the respondent about the problems.

The low proportion willing to consider a return was probably reduced because of the length of time since most of them had last left: half had left at least a year ago and a quarter between three months and a year before they were interviewed. Only ten per cent had left home in the previous month.

A substantial minority of homeless young people move away from their home areas. Inner London in particular attracts migrants from other parts of the country. Around a quarter (23 per cent) of agency clients interviewed were outside the area of their family home and all but two of these were clients of London agencies. All the London agencies in the sample were in inner London boroughs, but a third of their clients (30 per cent) were from outer London boroughs. All but one of the hostels were in inner London. Over a quarter (28 per cent) of the residents interviewed had family homes outside London and a further quarter (25 per cent) were from outer London boroughs.

It is often beneficial for such young people to move back to their home areas, especially if they are helped to move out of areas such as the West End of London which have an established street culture and high level of risk for young people. Some major agencies working in central London now believe it is important to move young people out of the area as soon as possible and certainly within three months, before they become absorbed into the homelessness culture. Other agencies tend to refer young people into the area because of the services available there,
although central agencies discourage this. They try to find organisations which can help them in the young person’s home area and there are specialist agencies giving assistance to move back to their home area, if necessary with the help of family mediation.

**Family mediation**

Many agencies offer family mediation, although in practice it appears that far fewer provide a detailed specialist service. More commonly, they make limited contact with parents to see if the young person could return home. This is as much as many agencies can provide with their limited resources. But useful though this service is, family mediation is a much more specialised and intensive process.

Although we selected the agencies for our survey because they stated that they provided mediation services to young people, only 17 per cent (13 people) were actively engaged in mediation at the time of the interview. Most people were using the range of other services offered by the agencies. The great majority (80 per cent) were receiving housing advice; two thirds (68 per cent) reported receiving general advice and support and around a quarter (27 per cent) were receiving employment and training advice. A further quarter (23 per cent) mentioned befriending and a fifth (21 per cent) were engaged in skills training (Appendix 2, table 20).

The proportions actively engaged in mediation varied between agencies, depending on whether they offered a specialist service. Some of the generalist agencies did not in practice offer detailed mediation and had no users engaged with it.

Some generalist services have referral arrangements with specialist mediation services, while others have close links by providing facilities for a satellite service provided by a specialist agency.

The agencies interviewed differed in their views of what proportion of homeless young people might benefit from family mediation. Some of those which did not provide such a service thought it would only be a very small proportion, as low as four per cent or fewer, while others, especially those providing a mediation service thought that it might be suitable in up to 40 per cent of cases.

Research into work with families has found that unless support is undertaken simultaneously with the young person and their parents, there is little if any improvement in family relationships or young people’s behaviour (Biehal and others, 2000). Family mediation is a recognition of the need to work with parents and other family members, as well as the young person who is homeless or threatened with homelessness. Agencies pointed out that this involves work to develop parenting skills and also to offer practical benefits to parents, while recognising that the young person is the agency’s client and that detailed help with deep rooted problems will need to be provided by other specialist agencies. The work often also involves other family members including siblings, where there may be either conflicts or support, and grandparents who may offer alternative support systems.

A common model used in family mediation is solution focused brief therapy. *Family Preservation, A Brief Therapy Workbook* (Berg, 1991) gives detailed guidance. Some of its key features are:

- it is time limited
- it identifies clear, specific, measurable aims to work towards, starting with small, simple and realistically achievable goals
- these goals are identified by the client
- it starts from where the client is, rather than trying to change their mind
- it focuses on solutions rather than problems
- assessment consists of proposals to achieve the agreed goals, not a list of problems
- it encourages at least one of the people involved to do something different from their predictable behaviours
- it encourages behaviours which are exceptions to the problems
- the focus is on family interaction, rather than the individual psyche
- the aim is to do something about problems, not just talk about them
- solutions must be realistically achievable within the client’s current situation and resources
- the problem solving should where possible spring from the family itself, even if their methods are unconventional.
Outcome measures from family mediation work in agencies we interviewed show varying results, but suggest that it is possible to help up to half of young people who are threatened with homelessness to stay at home. And for around one in six who are already homeless to return to their family.

A review of international research on preventive work concluded that:

“Good results are reported for the family preservation approaches, in particular those that are home-based, that use cognitive-behavioural modification as the agent of change and that act in close relation to the actual problems that have surfaced in the daily life of the families at risk. Family preservation services can play a key role in the prevention of homelessness.”

(Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997)

However, evaluations of time-limited family preservation services in North America and Britain have also found that where there are multiple, deep rooted and long-term problems, they are unlikely to be effective (Biehal and others, 2000). For the services examined in this report, this suggests that such approaches are most effective as a means of alleviating an immediate crisis and that other programmes of longer-term support are likely to be necessary for young people with higher levels of need.

An evaluation of 26 pilot projects in Australia which provided family intervention services aimed at preventing youth homelessness found that:

“In the short term, families want practical measures to alleviate immediate stress. This contrasts with many approaches which are locked into a specific model of service, such as therapeutic counselling or crisis responses which provide accommodation services but little attention to family-relations supports. Projects found that young people and parents respond well to approaches that are solution focused.” (DFCS, 1998)

Additional points raised by agencies we interviewed about this approach included:

- the importance of not getting stuck in past problems, instead of finding a positive way forward
- the need for clarity about what all parties, including the agency, are prepared to do to support the mediation
- the benefits in some circumstances of having a separate person within the agency to work as a mediator with the parents until the two sides have been brought together. This tackles the problem of the agency being seen to be taking the side of the young person who is their client
- an agreed written action plan with the young person and other family members, to monitor progress
- the importance of avoiding overtones of counselling, to which many people are resistant
- the need for mediation to form part of a wider package of long term holistic support, including referral to other specialist agencies
- a role for lower level and indirect mediation, such as telephone calls to family members and helping young people with writing letters to them
- the agency should withdraw if it becomes clear that mediation is making no progress, rather than become drawn in to longer term problems. If necessary, referral can be made to a specialist agency.

When young people cannot stay with their parents

The most common reasons the young people we surveyed gave for not wanting to return to live in their family home were that it was better for them not to be there, or in some way it would be too damaging to return (39 per cent):

“If I go home I won’t go nowhere, I’ll end up an alcoholic or a drug addict and I don’t want to be neither. I’m better off here.” [m, 21, h]

Or that relationships would not improve by returning (27 per cent):

“Because I think it’s better this way. We get on better separately. I can’t handle it when she (mum) drinks and argues. I’ve had it all my life. I need a break.” [f, 16, h]

Or that they had become used to independent living (24 per cent)

“No matter what I’ve been through, I’d rather be independent. I can manage alone, or I believe I can. Things won’t change with my mum.” [m, 17, h]
Only a fifth (19 per cent) said they would consider, or were currently engaged in mediation. The most common reason people gave for not wanting mediation was that they believed they did not need it (32 per cent), either because family relationships had improved as a result of them leaving, or that they felt they did not need anyone to make approaches on their behalf and could do it for themselves.

A quarter (28 per cent) did not want mediation, either because they did not want to return home, or because they felt matters had gone beyond the stage of reconciliation:

“Because I know it would never work with my father. We don’t want to see each other. I know what stirs up and calms my dad. Sometimes he blames me for little things that aren’t my fault. Little things he takes as a big thing. He doesn’t show he loves me. I feel he only loves the younger ones, like I’m only renting a room there.”

[m, 19, h]

A similar proportion (27 per cent) believed it would not help, including those who had had mediation before:

“I’ve had it before – the social worker set it up for me with my mum. It didn’t help. Only me and my mum can really help.”

[f, 17, h]

Previous negative experiences of counselling may have affected what people thought mediation might involve, as happened to Gary.

**Case study: Gary**

Gary’s mother was a lone parent with three sons. He found her very strict and controlling. He got into trouble at school for stealing because she did not give him enough money:

“She’d give me £1 for a week. That didn’t cover enough for lunch, I’d be hungry so I started stealing.”

The school arranged for counselling, but Gary felt inadequately supported because he was unable to fully talk about the problems he was experiencing in the presence of his mother:

“The counselling was far me – if she (mum) was in the room I’d keep things back as I was too scared to say them. I had to lie and water down my words. That’s not good for me. So it didn’t help. It just proved my mum right, as she’d use the fact school wanted me to have counselling as proof I was mad and she’d bring that up in future arguments. No-one supported me at all. I was asked to come for meetings but not told what they were for.

Also you don’t want that person to hate you. She’d hate me even more if she was made to look unkind in front of someone else.”

He found the counselling aggravated the situation at home:

“I’d get it worse when I got home. I didn’t want her angry with me, I’d try and please her.”

Some young people reported both sides had difficulties engaging with counselling:

“We tried everything – my mum went to Social services, to mediation services. I wouldn’t turn up or I wouldn’t talk when I was there. My mum isn’t someone who’ll talk either, neither of us are.”

[f, 22, h]

Others, thought they had been targeted for counselling when they believed it might have been more beneficial for their parent:

“I was seeing a counsellor because they thought I had a behaviour problem, which I didn’t. Used to go once a week for one term. It was more aimed at me than my mum because they thought I had the problem.”

[f, 18, h]

It appears that these young people felt that counselling had done more harm than good.

Where young people cannot stay with their parents, family mediation may help to maintain whatever links are possible with their family. Even if they did not return to live, half the young people in our survey (51 per cent) said they wanted help to improve relationships with family members.

Longer-term homeless young people tend to lose their original social networks, particularly if they have moved away from their home area. Some agencies give help with tracing parents and other family members and also in maintaining contacts with other supportive adults – such as neighbours and family friends – who might have been important during their childhood. These
can be as important for long term stability as a temporary return to parents. Our survey found that relatives and friends sometimes themselves act as informal mediators with estranged parents.

Where young people go to stay with other relatives or friends, mediators can help to clarify for both parties what the arrangements are, for example what financial contribution the young person will make. This did not happen in Fiona’s case.

**Case study: Fiona**

Fiona had suffered physical and verbal abuse from her mother since the age of 12. Social services were in contact but she was not taken into care. She was bullied at school and then got into trouble herself truanting, and was suspended for disruptive behaviour. She left home several times, finally leaving at the age of 17. While trying to keep up with a college course to make up for lost time at school, she moved to friends, a hostel and briefly with her father:

“I stayed with my dad for a while but he has an addiction problem so people were worried about me staying there, I couldn’t do education there.”

She then went to live with an aunt but without any agreement about the household contributions she would make. Her aunt expected her to pay rent although she was at college full-time:

“Because I’m not working I got into debt to her. She said I owed money. We argued about other little things so she asked me to leave. Now I’ve had to move out I’ll have to work full-time, so I can’t do the course I wanted.”

Where the young person has had to leave home, agencies which took a preventive approach pointed out the importance of not labelling them as homeless and helping them to avoid defining themselves as such. They believed that young people risked embarking on a homelessness ‘career’, which can lead to prolonged stays in hostels, possible involvement in rough sleeping and joining a homelessness sub-culture.

Reviewing international research, Van de Ploeg and Scholte (1997) argue that homeless people may gradually lose their affiliation with mainstream society through losing their housing and social networks. Simultaneously, a process of reaffiliation takes place with other homeless people, which can lead to alternative roles, attitudes and behaviour. They also argue that many homeless young people develop an external locus of control, which means that they attribute causes of their behaviour to circumstances outside of their control. This attitude is characteristic of many young people who have experienced insoluble problems throughout their lives. The two factors may be reinforced by agencies which label young people as ‘homeless’ and in a different category from other young people.

Agencies we interviewed also emphasised that their work with the young person did not end if they returned home, but they would then work on longer term housing opportunities with them. Indeed the promise of such assistance could itself help ease tensions in the family home.

**Emergency and respite accommodation**

Access to emergency accommodation is an essential part of a crisis intervention service. Many young people are already homeless when they first contact an agency. Sometimes pressures at home may be such that a short break may help the family to look at matters more calmly. In cities and larger towns this accommodation can be provided by hostels, but in smaller towns and rural areas the need may be too dispersed to make this a realistic option. At present homeless young people in these areas may have to move elsewhere to find a hostel. This is almost always undesirable as it removes them from their existing network of family and friends and risks replacing it with entry into a homelessness subculture. Alternatives to hostels, include:

- Staying temporarily with other relatives. Agencies believe this is usually the best option, as it maintains family contact and the involvement of concerned adults, such as grandparents or older siblings.
- Staying with friends. This can also be preferable as it helps to sustain their existing social network.
- Nightstop schemes which provide emergency accommodation in the homes of a network of volunteer hosts (for further details see Folkard, 1998).
Young adult short-term fostering and supported lodgings.

In the latter two cases, schemes need to be professionally managed to provide vetting, support and supervision of placements.

**The need for inter-agency work**

It has been a recurring theme in this report that homeless young people and their families often experience multiple problems and that they often need wider ranging and longer term support than that provided by crisis intervention services. There is also a need to identify young people at risk at the earliest opportunity. Both of these features indicate the importance of inter-agency work.

Recent government guidance on the assessment of children in need stated that:

“Early intervention is essential to support children and families before problems, either from within the family or as a result of external factors, which have an impact on parenting capacity and family life escalate into crisis or abuse. Government departments, statutory and voluntary agencies, academics and practitioners contribute to this work. Good joint working practices and understanding at a local level are vital to the success of the early intervention agenda. Local agencies, including schools and education support services, social services departments, youth offending teams, primary and more specialist health care services and voluntary and private agencies should work together to establish agreed referral protocols which will help to ensure that early indications of a child being at risk of social exclusion receive appropriate attention.” (Department of Health, 2000)

Agencies we interviewed identified a range of key partners with whom they worked or had identified a need to develop such partnerships.

Schools are likely to be among the first agencies to identify behavioural problems. These often manifest themselves in truancy and exclusion. We found from our survey most respondents (79 per cent) had truanted and four out of ten (43 per cent) had been excluded from school at some stage. Almost half (45 per cent) reported that problems at school had been a reason (Appendix 2, table 1).

In practice, agencies reported that their contacts with schools were very limited. The young people we interviewed said that they had rarely received or accessed help through their school. Two thirds of those who reported problems at school said they had not had any help from anyone at school. Only a fifth (20 per cent) specifically mentioned someone at school as having helped in some way.

Some were offered personal support which clearly they found helpful:

“She (teacher) actually sat down and listened to me. I’d talk and cry and I felt comfortable crying in front of her. She helped me release a lot of stress. She helped me a hell of a lot then. That ended when I left school.” [f, 18, h]

In another case, teachers tried to find practical solutions to prevent disruptive behaviour:

“I had two teachers that mainly looked after the bad behaviour (in the school). Money seemed to be the main problems for both of us, me and mum, so they would work out ways to give me money and in return I had to behave.” [f, 18, h]

Fewer than one in ten (9 per cent) reported that someone from school had tried to resolve family problems which were not school-related. Usually this meant noticing there were problems and contacting other agencies:

“I started losing weight – they noticed at school. Nobody listened to me at the beginning. I had a social worker but she didn’t do anything. They thought I was lying or something. But once other people got involved they had to believe you.” [f, 19, a]

One young woman was offered mentoring:

“Mentoring – you can talk in confidence and it won’t go no further. Although they can’t help with problems at home they know when you’re feeling pressured and take you out of lessons and calm you down.” [f, 17, h]

Young people whose problems had been noticed at school and had been dealt with sympathetically were usually appreciative:

“My teacher at school tried to help. He talked sense to me. I can’t remember exactly what he said – it was the last day at my junior school. I
The aim should be for schools to recognise they have a key role in identifying young people at risk and in helping them to access specialist services rather than provide such support directly.

Social services have wide duties and powers to provide services for children and young people, including preventive work under the 1989 Children Act. Although such work is growing, many social services departments report they have very limited resources for preventive work with families (Vernon and Sinclair, 1998).

A survey of parents has found that half of them complained of the difficulty of getting help from social services with a troublesome child and that there is a danger of social services targeting exclusively care leavers among 16 and 17 year olds, to the exclusion of other homeless young people (Biehal and others, 2000).

In our survey of homeless young people, only 13 per cent reported that a social worker had tried to resolve the family problems the last time they had left home, although 28 per cent of households were in contact with social services at the time. Among recurrent leavers, 37 per cent were in contact with social services but only eight per cent (seven people) reported having help from a social worker to return home after their first episode of leaving.

There are, however, questions as to whether social services are the best agency to carry out preventive work with homeless and potentially homeless young people. Many social workers lack youth work skills in engaging teenagers and the experience can make young people reluctant to accept further help (Biehal and others, 2000). Our interviews with young people and provider agencies suggested that statutory services often lack the flexibility of voluntary agencies to shape their service to the needs of each individual. Some parents attach a stigma to social services, associating them with child protection and ‘problem families’ (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

In our survey, just as some young people found counselling had exacerbated their problems (page 27) others found contact with social services had added to their difficulties:

“My step-dad went to social services but that made it worse…when I told them what was happening and they spoke to my mum it made it worse. She denied anything happened even though I had bruises…I felt shut in a closet.”

[m, 22, a]

All of this evidence suggests that homeless services for young people may be better provided by voluntary agencies, funded where necessary by social services.

Local authority housing departments also have a central role to play, both as a provider of accommodation and a source of referrals of homeless young people who approach them. The Chartered Institute of Housing has published a detailed good practice guide Housing Strategies for Youth (Polkard, 1998). The importance of the housing department as an early warning beacon is illustrated by experience in Newcastle, where the City Council found that two thirds of the young people rehoused because of family breakdown had previously applied for housing. A joint council and voluntary sector team was set up to support young people who made housing applications. As a result, young people were diverted to more appropriate options, including family reconciliation (Evans, 1996).

Youth services are an important source of referrals and some agencies we interviewed mentioned that youth workers were particularly good at identifying young people at risk of homelessness.

Young homeless people and their families may also come into contact with the police, through criminal activity or family violence and police services could have an important role in identifying young people at risk. A third (31 per cent) of young people in the survey reported that being in trouble with the police had been a reason for leaving home (Appendix 2, table 1). A fifth (21 per cent) had been in a young offenders’ institution or prison, or both (Appendix 2, table 6). For ten per cent, problems with the police involved the use of
drugs. Only one young person reported having had help with problems at home from a probation officer. Seven people were taken back home by the police after their first episodes of leaving.

In addition, specialist services providing support such as counselling, and help with mental health and substance abuse problems are an essential part of the inter-agency network. Some agencies interviewed operated joint referral protocols with local voluntary and statutory organisations. Some arrange for other agencies, such as drug teams, to offer satellite services on their premises.

An essential part of successful inter-agency work is that there should be clear responsibility for overall active case management. Few agencies had yet developed formal procedures for this.

**Style of work**

Preventive interventions with homeless young people can only work with their full cooperation. This is particularly so with family mediation. This makes it essential that the services are provided in an informal, accessible and friendly manner that is congenial to young people. All the agencies we interviewed highlighted the importance of this style of work – and the fact that they achieved it is suggested by the high proportion of referrals which came by word of mouth. This referral route is important because it reaches young people not otherwise in contact with agencies and gives them credibility if they have been recommended by friends and peers. It is also an important route to reaching young people before they get to a point of crisis.

The agencies and young people we interviewed identified a range of factors which made services more accessible and increased their acceptability to potential users.

Most agencies ran a drop-in service for first referrals, rather than a system of appointments. One agency which had both systems in different locations found a much higher take up with a drop-in system. This helped to make access more informal and enabled a rapid response to emergencies. Some aimed for a response to a family crisis within a matter of hours. Agencies are sometimes contacted in the first instance by parents and it is therefore also important that services are seen by them as accessible and non-judgemental.

Some agencies operated satellite services in different locations where young people are likely to be, for example in youth clubs, cafes and pubs. They can also offer informal access through workers engaging young people in conversation. A youth work rather than social work approach is more likely to be effective. Where peripatetic drop-in services are offered, they need to be at regular times as it takes some time for word of mouth referrals to operate. In rural areas with poor transport, it can be particularly helpful to offer an outreach or mobile service. However it can also be costly, because of staff travelling time, the need to have more than one worker in isolated locations for safety reasons and because the dispersed population may mean low numbers of users at any one location. Rural agencies had to balance improved accessibility against the costs of providing such an outreach service. Some had decided that dispersed drop-in services were not cost effective, but all agreed that further thought was necessary to tackle this problem.

Workers must treat young people in a relaxed and informal way, listening to them, taking their aspirations seriously and working through their options with them in a realistic manner. Work with the young people must be non-directive, although this does not mean simply aiming to meet their demands. For example, where they are looking for accommodation, a realistic assessment with them of their alternatives is more helpful than simply seeking to place them in a hostel or flat of their own without an assessment of whether this would be their best option.

Most young people (71 per cent) in our survey found it easy to talk to the workers they were in contact with at the agency or hostel where they were interviewed:

“They’re just like young enough to talk to and mature enough to understand.” [m, 18, a]

The clients of agencies providing support services were much more likely to find the workers easy to talk to (87 per cent) than hostel residents (55 per cent). In the hostels, young people found the staff more variable, with a
third (31 per cent) saying that some were easier to talk to than others (Appendix 2, table 21). This highlights the different roles of hostel staff and support workers and the need for specialist projects separate from the provision of accommodation. Family mediation is a specialist role requiring a non-judgemental approach. One agency which ran both hostels and a mediation service found that staff cannot be expected to combine the two roles of hostel worker and mediator, since hostel staff must necessarily enforce rules as an important part of their job.

Half the young people we interviewed (53 per cent) could not think of any subject they would rather not talk to the workers about. Here again, the agency staff were thought to be more approachable, with six out of ten (61 per cent) users saying there was nothing they would not talk about, compared with less than half (45 per cent) of the hostel residents.

Those who said there were matters they preferred not to talk about with the staff were given a prompt list of possible sensitive areas. Most common among these were physical violence and sexual abuse (eleven people in each case) followed by self-harm and problems with a girlfriend or boyfriend (nine people in each case).

Support services need to take account of cultural and contextual factors. It is helpful to offer a choice of a male or female worker and also to a worker from their own ethnic community, particularly where there are strong cultural factors involved such as different family values. However, in these cases it should not be assumed that a worker from the same ethnic community will always be more welcome to parents.

While informality is essential, this does not mean the work should be unstructured. Indeed some agencies use agreed written action plans with both young people and parents. Some agencies also use written agreements between young people and their parents, although these are used as a working tool rather than a fixed document.

In most agencies, there is an emphasis on young people doing things for themselves. This builds confidence and independent living skills.

Several agencies mentioned that this style of work was best carried out by a voluntary agency. They often have a culture of more informal work, they are not bound by statutory duties and they may not have the negative connotations of statutory services in the eyes of both young people and their families. Some local authorities had recognised this and funded voluntary agencies for these services.

Outcomes

Large scale studies in the United States have highlighted the difficulties in evaluating the outcomes of family preservation services. With so many variables affecting the family life of children and young people over a number of years, it is difficult to predict what the outcome would have been without the preventive intervention (Biehal and others, 2000).

A review of international research concluded that although most evaluations of preventive programmes strongly believed they worked – at least for some young people – in most studies the effects were measured only over relatively short timescales and that there is a need for longer term evaluations (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

Different definitions of outcomes between agencies make it currently impossible to compare them precisely. In many agencies there was little detailed information available on outcomes. The agencies we studied, which did not undertake detailed preventive work, reported that only a very small proportion of homeless young people returned home.

However, one of the most successful specialist projects resolved the crisis for nearly half (47 per cent) of young people who were experiencing a family crisis and still living at home and 15 per cent of those already homeless returned home. Another agency helped 14 per cent of their clients to return to their family home. These findings suggest that specialist schemes can help a significant minority of homeless young people. They should also be seen in the context that, for many of the remainder, returning home would be either unrealistic or undesirable and that agencies also aim to help with family reconciliation, even where there is not a return home.
This chapter has identified a number of features of good practice which have been developed by agencies providing crisis intervention. The next chapter considers the role of these services in the wider spectrum of programmes which aim to prevent homelessness among young people.
All the agencies we interviewed emphasised that crisis intervention should form part of a much wider programme of prevention of homelessness. It was commonly agreed that the family problems experienced by so many homeless young people had their roots in childhood. They were often first manifested in behavioural problems around the age of 13, but many had their origins in earlier years. In some cases they appeared to be related to a step-parent moving into the home. Other research has identified 13 as the average age at which problem behaviour, such as running away from home, truancy and offending first develops (Graham and Bowling, 1995).

Among the young people we interviewed, just under half (46 per cent) had first left their family home aged 15 or younger. Two people had first run away as young as five years old and 13 interviewees (nine per cent) were younger than 11 when they first ran away. A quarter (25 per cent) had first left aged 16 or 17 and a further quarter (25 per cent) were aged between 18 and 21 (Appendix 2, table 10).

Young women were more likely to have first left home at a younger age than young men. Over half (55 per cent) of the female interviewees reported they had first left home aged 15 or under, and a third (31 per cent) had left at 16 or 17, compared with 40 per cent of young men who had first left at 15 or under, and a fifth (22 per cent) at 16 or 17 (Appendix 2, table 11).

This chapter gives an outline of wider preventive programmes, to provide the context in which crisis intervention must be seen, and goes on to suggest some factors which might help in identifying at an earlier stage young people who are at risk of homelessness.

A wide range of preventive schemes

Programmes to tackle social exclusion among young people have a high priority in current government policy. Many of these programmes tackle the same problems as those faced by homeless young people and will have an impact on them (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Services which specifically aim to prevent homelessness include:

- education in schools on homelessness and leaving home
- advice services for young people
- family mediation services for young people in dispute with their families
- services to help people return to accommodation in their home areas
- extended and improved support for young people leaving care
- family support work from the early years of childhood to teenage years
- support for people in contact with the criminal justice system
- support for existing tenants of social housing with mental health and substance abuse problems, including the development of specialist support for people with multiple problems
- support for people at risk of losing their home because of relationship breakdown, rent arrears or nuisance to neighbours
- multiple services and inter-agency work provided through day centres and advice centres
- befriending and mentoring services to tackle social isolation
- specialist support for young people and women.

The Safe in the City programme in London is a partnership of voluntary and statutory agencies which aims to develop a wide ranging programme to prevent youth homelessness, funding existing providers to develop and evaluate new models (Safe in the City, 2000). Its work covers:

- personal skills development in young people such as mentoring, peer education, counselling and support
- help for families in need of support, including family mediation, young runaways, respite care and family mentoring
- referral and support services including outreach, one-stop shops and estate based services
- developing local strategies.

Nationally, the new Connexions service for young people has the potential to play a central role in identifying those at risk of homelessness.
and guiding them towards preventive services. The aim of Connexions is to:

“provide a radical new approach to guiding and supporting all young people through their teenage years and in their transition to adulthood and working life. The new service will be delivered primarily through a network of Personal Advisers linking in with specialist support services. They will be drawn together from a range of existing public, private, voluntary and community sector organisations, and build on best practice…. The new service will play a central role in helping to deal with problems experienced by young people, removing any wider barriers to effective engagement in learning that young people are suffering. It will do this by providing high quality support and guidance, and by brokering access for young people to a range of more specialist services. The Connexions Service will ensure that all young people have access to the support and guidance they need, when and wherever they need it, irrespective of their circumstances.”

(Department for Education and Employment, 1999)

The agencies we interviewed were at that time unclear how Connexions would develop, but hoped that it would act as a means of earlier identification of young people at risk of homelessness and a referral route to specialist preventive services. The proposed Connexions national and local database of information about young people could help with identifying those at risk of homelessness.

Research with parents of homeless young people has shown the need for parenting support services (Smith and others, 1998). Government programmes have also recognised that advice and support services for parents play a central role in preventive services for socially excluded young people, including family mediation and respite care (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

Where there is a concentration of needs in particular areas – for example on large estates – neighbourhood based projects may be an efficient means of targeting services. However research has shown that just as many young people who experience poverty, poor family support and other problems live outside deprived neighbourhoods as in them. There is therefore a need for comprehensive services that cover all areas (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

The Social Exclusion Unit has also recommended that there is a case for a single ring-fenced budget for preventive work with young people in very disadvantaged risk groups and that further thought needs to be given to the gap in support programmes for families with children aged between five and 13 (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000).

The need for support does not end for many homeless young people after they have been accommodated. Young people who leave home because of family conflicts are most likely to need support for independent living and the least likely to get it (Jones, 1995a). Failure to provide this continuing support will leave many at risk of renewed homelessness.

Risk factors for homeless young people

Many of the problems of homeless young people require intensive support at particular times. It will therefore be important to identify individuals who are at high risk because general programmes are unlikely to provide sufficient support by themselves. The Dutch Prevention of Homelessness Programme screens young people who are leaving care for risk factors associated with homelessness and such an approach might be developed here (Van der Ploeg and Scholte, 1997).

The evidence from our research for this report suggests that key risk factors include:

- problems at school, including truancy and exclusion
- families where parents have separated, or there are step-parents
- disputes in the family related to the presence of a step-parent. Where school exclusion is combined with the presence of a step-parent, there appears to be a particularly high risk (Bruegel and Smith, 1999)
- history of physical or sexual abuse
- parents with difficulties such as substance abuse or mental health problems
- poor parenting
- previous contact with other services such as
social services, psychiatric services and education social workers
● periods in care
● siblings who have been homeless
● leaving home before the age of 16, including running away
● childhood conduct disorders
● previous episodes of homelessness
● criminal activity
● application to the local authority housing department.

Earlier chapters have examined the evidence on what is most effective in programmes to prevent homelessness among young people. The final chapter considers the lessons for the future.
5. Conclusions: a programme of crisis intervention work with homeless young people

This chapter draws on the findings of the research to recommend a model for the development of crisis intervention services for young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, because of family disputes.

Recommendations appear as numbered paragraphs.

The role of prevention and crisis intervention

Family disputes are a significant cause of homelessness among young people. Many of the problems underlying these disputes are long standing and related to other aspects of social exclusion.

1. Preventive programmes need to start when children are still young and to support both children and parents.
2. The aim of homelessness preventive services is not to keep young people in their parental home indefinitely, nor should they aim to resolve all the family’s problems. They need to have a clear objective of ensuring that the young person can leave home in a planned way with adequate social, emotional and financial support to make a successful transition to independent living.

There is currently a wide range of initiatives aimed at preventing social exclusion among young people and improving family support (Social Exclusion Unit, 2000). If these are successful they will also help to prevent homelessness, since they are tackling problems such as educational disadvantage and involvement in crime, which are also associated with increased risks of homelessness.

Many more long term preventive programmes will be needed but, however successful they are, there will continue to be young people who fall through the net and who are at imminent risk of homelessness.

Crisis intervention work can be successful in preventing some young people from sleeping rough, or embarking on a homelessness career of moving around hostels and insecure accommodation.

3. Where possible a return to the parental home, staying with other relatives, or even friends, is preferable to institutional accommodation such as a hostel. However, other accommodation may be the best option where there has been violence or abuse at home, the tensions are simply too damaging, or the young person’s support needs are too high.

Local strategies

Although the causes of family disputes are similar in different areas, the consequences for service provision vary. For example, in some cities there is a concentration of homeless young people in central areas, many of whom may have come from elsewhere. By contrast, homeless young people are dispersed over some rural areas with poor transport facilities and difficulties of access to services.

Government legislation to require local authorities to produce homelessness strategies fell with the 2001 general election, but it is expected that similar legislation will be re-introduced.

4. Preventive services need to be delivered and planned locally and there is therefore a need for local strategies.
5. Local authorities should include programmes to prevent homelessness among young people leaving their family home as an important part of their homelessness strategies.

There will need to be a co-ordinated response whichever department or agency the young person first contacts.

6. Key partners in the preventive strategy should include:
- voluntary agencies
- housing departments
- social services
- schools and other education services
– youth services
– Connexions
– the police
– youth offending teams
– probation services
– health services
– drug and alcohol services
– registered social landlords.

7. Local preventive strategies need to encompass a wide range of interventions including:
– long term preventive programmes working with families with children of all ages. These will form part of wider programmes to tackle social exclusion
– crisis intervention by both generalist and specialist homelessness services
– referral to specialist services for longer term problems of both children and parents, such as mental health, alcohol and drug problems
– continuing support for tenancy sustainment where necessary.

Crisis intervention services need to be accessible, flexible and acceptable to young people and their parents.

8. Services should be available, at least for first contact, on a drop-in basis and not just by formal referral.

9. Satellite and peripatetic services should be considered – particularly in rural areas where there are difficulties in accessing services.

10. Agencies should be able to respond quickly to threatened homelessness, sometimes in a matter of hours.

11. Voluntary agencies are better adapted to flexible and informal work with young people and should generally provide the front line service, rather than statutory agencies such as social services or housing authorities. However, statutory authorities should play a full role in enabling such services and working with them, including providing funding and accommodation.

Services need to be attuned to the needs of young people of different ages: there are many differences between the needs of most 16 year olds and most 25 year olds. They also need to be culturally sensitive to the needs of different ethnic groups.

12. In some circumstances mediation might be more effectively carried out by someone from the same ethnic group as the young person and their family.

13. The involvement of young people in planning the services is an important way of ensuring that they are provided in an accessible manner.

**Identifying young people at risk of homelessness**

The first need for young people caught up in a family dispute is for access to sympathetic support and advice. The new Connexions service is ideally placed to provide this through their personal advisers.

14. The identification of young people at risk of homelessness should form an important part of the responsibilities of Connexions personal advisers. Key risk factors have been identified in Chapter 4 and consideration should be given to use of the Connexions database to identify young people at risk.

15. The planned work by Connexions on common assessment tools should incorporate homelessness risk assessment and housing support needs.

Schools have a key role to play in identifying young people at risk at an earlier stage. In addition, young people themselves often express their risk of homelessness by asking for help from a range of agencies including advice centres, hostels, youth workers, social services or housing departments.

16. All agencies should work jointly at a local level to agree protocols for assessments and service provision that will alert services at the earliest opportunity to the risk of homelessness and the need for preventive action.

17. Protocols between local agencies should also agree arrangements for a case management approach to homeless young people, so that an identified lead agency takes responsibility for each young person.
18. All young people applying to local authorities, hostels or other accommodation providers should have a comprehensive assessment of their accommodation and support needs. The starting point for the assessment should not be the classification of the young person as ‘homeless’ and the provision of accommodation. Instead, there should be exploration of whether they have family or friends who could provide a supportive home, while longer term housing plans are worked out and any support needs assessed.

19. If it is necessary to take the young person into accommodation in an emergency, a comprehensive needs assessment should take place as soon as possible thereafter and certainly within the first week.

20. A key objective should be preventing the young person from identifying themselves as homeless, or as a member of the homelessness subculture that exists in some areas.

21. Rapid referral should be made to a family mediation service where this may help to reconcile the young person with their family.

22. Emergency accommodation should be available in all areas, if necessary through the use of Nightstop schemes.

**Crisis intervention by generalist agencies**

Agencies providing generalist support to young people such as advice centres, hostels or youth services can make successful interventions to prevent homelessness.

23. As a first step, agencies should go through a ‘reality check’ with young people who are planning to leave home, or who have recently done so. This consists of going through their realistic housing options with them.

Agencies can, for example, look through local papers at adverts for private rented accommodation to show young people the levels of rent demanded. Agencies can also work through with young people the living costs they would have to meet.

24. Agencies should also help young people to think about whether staying or returning home is a realistic option and where appropriate should contact parents to discuss the possibilities of staying at home.

Many young people at this stage then decide to stay at home until they are in a better position to survive independently. However, where there are serious problems in relationships with parents, they are likely to have to refer to specialist family mediation services if there is a possibility of reconciliation.

While the new rights to housing for some homeless young people proposed by the government are welcome, care will be needed that this does not result in too easy access to accommodation, as this might make it more difficult to make realistic plans with the young person.

25. The aim of local authorities in helping homeless young people should be to assess the best accommodation options for them at that time, including staying at home, and to make longer term plans for a move to independent living.

Simply placing young people, particularly the very young, in their own self contained flats, perhaps supported by Housing Benefit, is likely to result in a high rate of tenancy failure and may start the young person on a homelessness career that could have been averted with more careful planning and support.

For some agencies a radical shift in philosophy and work practices will be necessary to achieve these changes.

26. Training of staff will be necessary to move to a new style of working which is more holistic and sympathetically interventionist.

27. All agencies working with homeless young people should aim to develop referral arrangements with specialist preventive agencies, particularly with family mediation services.
Specialist services

Family mediation can be effective in preventing homelessness in a substantial minority of cases.

28. Family mediation should be available to all young people who might benefit from it.

29. On present evidence, the most effective services appear to be those which operate the solution focused brief therapy model, outlined in Chapter 3.

There are relatively few specialist family mediation services for homeless young people, but they have already produced sufficient evidence of their potential effectiveness to justify a wider pilot programme.

30. The government should fund pilot projects in different types of area over a three year period.

31. Although solution focused brief therapy appears to offer the most effective approach, there should be scope for agencies to bid to run alternative pilot models, if they believe they are likely to be more effective.

32. The pilot projects should cover a range of types of area, from cities to smaller towns and rural locations.

33. Clear outcome measures should be established and the pilot projects should be evaluated from the beginning of the programme to establish the potential effectiveness of different interventions.

34. If current evidence of their effectiveness is confirmed, a national network of family mediation services should be established.

35. Sources of funding could include central government, perhaps through the dedicated preventive fund proposed by the Social Exclusion Unit, local authority social services and housing departments, and charitable bodies. A national network would need to identify a source of permanent finance and not be subject to short term funding regimes.

The way forward

A substantial minority of young people could be saved from homelessness through earlier intervention to resolve problems with their families. All agencies working with young people have a role to play in preventing homelessness by providing early warning of risk factors and ensuring there are referral arrangements with homelessness agencies. Agencies providing advice and accommodation can help to ensure that young people’s homelessness is not treated simply as a housing problem, but that all their support needs are assessed, including the prospect of reconciliation with their families. The new local authority homelessness strategies offer the opportunity to build such local networks of services.

Specialist family mediation services have already, with limited resources, demonstrated great potential and evidence from other countries also points to their success. What is now needed is a pilot scheme to test different approaches and to evaluate the prospects for a national network of family mediation services for young people at risk of homelessness.
Appendix 1. A profile of preventive services

This appendix gives brief details of the work of 12 agencies in England, some of whose services aim to prevent young people becoming homeless from their family home. The agencies were selected to cover a range of types of work and areas of the country, including cities, small towns and rural areas. The descriptions focus on the crisis intervention aspects of their work, although they also provide a wider range of other services to homeless young people. It gives an outline picture of the range of such services, focusing on specific points of interest in each agency, rather than giving a comprehensive description of all their work.

**Homeless at Risk Project (HARP), Rugby**

HARP provides advice and support for homeless people in Rugby, with around 60 per cent of their users being young people.

They do not try to force family mediation on to people and find that it is only appropriate in a small proportion of cases. They do try to help the young person to return home if they appear not to be coping, but emphasise that they have to work with the young person’s wishes in a non-judgemental way. Attempts to be directive will simply be counter-productive. It is important that the young person feels they are being listened to, as this is often a complaint they have about their parents. It may not be productive to broach the subject of returning home at first, but better to wait a few days, until they may be missing their family and want to go back. Sometimes it is the parents who approach HARP first.

They find that young people are much more likely to go to a voluntary than a statutory agency. They are able to choose a male or female worker, an important option when talking about sensitive family problems.

Where it has been agreed by all concerned an adviser discusses issues with the young person, while the manager works with their parents. A first step with all young people thinking of leaving home is to explain to them the limited options that are available. They might then decide to stay at home until they have wider opportunities. If the young person has problems with their family, HARP explores whether moving somewhere else is going to help resolve those problems. They identify the need for complete flexibility in each individual case and do not automatically aim to provide alternative housing for the young people if it does nothing about the underlying causes for their risk of homelessness.

Mediation often identifies a range of support needs for the young person that are not being met. Young people are also encouraged to make plans for employment and training and HARP staff will accompany a young person to the careers office if necessary. Work on this can also help with family mediation, as arguments with parents over employment are common.

HARP try to provide access to all necessary services through their office, including help with employment, training and benefits. As part of this approach, the local drugs team run by the Health Service offers sessions at HARP so that young people are not seen going to the drugs centre. They also run group meetings where young people discuss their experiences together.

They aim to agree a plan of action together with the young person. It is also important to have a cut-off point where a more specialist service, for example counselling, is needed.

Respite accommodation is seen as an important part of a crisis service although it can be difficult to fund and needs a high level of support and staffing. A large house which was used for emergency accommodation, became blocked as people did not move out and HARP were examining the prospects of using volunteers and private landlords to provide this service.

**South Birmingham Young Homeless Project (SBYHP)**

SBYHP provides a holistic advice, advocacy and support service covering housing, benefits, employment, education and training, health and money management. The project involves young people both on the management committee and as volunteers providing among other activities, mentoring and support. Many participants are people who have been helped in the past by SBYHP.
Major problems identified by the support and resettlement workers include:

- family breakdown, with new partners destabilising the young person’s security, reinforced by the priority given by their parent to the new relationship
- a lack of parenting skills
- school exclusions and truancy
- teenage pregnancy
- a sharp increase in the number of young people with mental health problems.

The project finds that by the time young people reach their service it is usually not feasible for them to stay in the family home. They do not undertake family mediation. However they do sometimes negotiate for the young person to stay for a week or two while accommodation is sorted out. Although some hostel spaces are available they are not the ideal option. They find that when young people move into a hostel they tend to meet only other hostel residents and to lose their normal support systems. Many hostels are not able to provide the type and level of support that their young people need.

**South Shropshire Young Persons Housing Project (SSYPHP)**

SSYPHP covers a predominantly rural area of over 400 square miles. They provide information, advice and support to young people on housing problems and on a wider range of personal issues when needed. They help some young people to carry on living at home until they can move out in a planned way. The majority of young people have already left home by the time they come for advice. They find that youth workers are well placed to identify young people who are at risk of homelessness.

Where possible face to face interviews are carried out with young people, going over with them in a very practical way what accommodation is available. For example looking at advertisements for private rented housing in the local paper. Taking account of rents and other living expenses, young people may decide they do not want to leave home before they are fully prepared. They will then look at options for managing differently at home. SSYPHP has two part time staff and does not undertake formal, structured family mediation. But they do speak to parents when necessary, as young people often feel they cannot raise a problem themselves. The mediation works informally and aims to offer practical benefits to both sides, for example by reassuring the parents that the agency will continue to support the young person in the search for independent accommodation. This can help to reduce the sense of threat which parents can feel from such a service.

A major problem for agencies in rural areas with poor public transport is how to deliver accessible services. SSYPHP offer telephone advice and home visits. They also used to organise drop-in sessions in different locations and plan to offer a van based service. However, organising such drop-in sessions is problematic. Premises have to be found where the worker is not alone and at risk. Sessions need to be regular – at least weekly – and it takes time for the service to become known. Travelling time for workers makes these and home visits a relatively costly service.

They also produce a booklet setting out the options for young people who are planning to leave home or who have become homeless. The booklet is widely distributed through for example, schools, post offices, cafes, video shops, pubs, village shops and youth centres. Local papers are also found to be a useful way of getting across basic information, especially to parents.

They also do workshops in schools on homelessness and sources of help.

**Project 16-21, Breckland and South Norfolk Leaving Care and Homeless Project**

Project 16-21 covers two district council areas in Norfolk, a predominantly rural area of 850 square miles consisting mainly of market towns, villages and hamlets. Major problems faced by young people include poor transport, isolation, a lack of services, amenities, education, training and employment opportunities, along with a lack of accessible accommodation for young people.

The project started in May 1999 and has uncovered extensive unmet need that was not
previously visible. They have found for example, a high proportion of young people with learning difficulties, many of whom had not been at school in their teenage years. There are problems of training and employment, with parents complaining about children doing nothing after they leave school. Project 16-21 finds that arranging training and employment is a vital part of stabilising young people – at least as important as the provision of accommodation.

They find that young people tend to come to them at a point of crisis. The best way of making contact with young people before they reach a crisis is through word of mouth among their peers.

The project has developed extensive joint work with a wide range of local agencies including:

- the local authority housing departments
- local housing associations and hostel providers
- voluntary agencies providing continuing support
- the police
- social services
- training agencies.

They have established joint protocols with the housing department and a housing association for the referral of young people.

They find that the proportion of young people returning to their family home is small as many have already been going backwards and forwards for years. Their family mediation work is more often helping young people to establish a continuing relationship with their parents rather than helping them to return to live with them.

They also find that it is frequently necessary to offer continuing support to the young people after the immediate crisis has been resolved. This includes emotional support and help with sustaining their accommodation.

As in other rural areas, the accessibility of services is a critical problem. They did consider setting up drop-in sessions for young people in different areas, but concluded that it would be very time consuming and therefore not cost effective.

The London Connection

The London Connection runs a seven-day-a-week day centre for homeless and other vulnerable young people in the West End of London. It is used by up to 200 people a day. In addition to the normal day centre services, it undertakes street outreach work and provides a wide range of support including:

- an advice service that undertakes detailed casework with clients
- specialist support for mental health and substance abuse problems
- a resettlement service
- employment and training schemes
- group work to develop independent living skills
- a volunteer befriending service.

An important element of their work is identifying newly homeless young people among their users who are at risk of sleeping rough. Among the factors used to prioritise the most vulnerable are: people with a history of care, those who have no support network or a dysfunctional family background, school exclusion, substance misuse, and a history of verbal, physical or sexual abuse. Those most at risk are targeted for intensive casework. An action plan is developed and agreed with each young person.

Cities in general – and London in particular – act as magnets for homeless young people: partly because of the concentration of services there and partly because of the attractions of city life for young people. The main emphasis for London Connection is, wherever possible, to divert young people away from the street culture in the West End of London and to find alternative routes into suitable housing.

A detailed resource pack covering services available within each London borough provides reference material for identifying services to which young people can be referred. Casework includes personal support, advocacy, referrals to mediation services, escorts, fares to return to the area they came from and help accessing local services.

Services aim to emphasise to young people the difficulties and risks of homelessness in central London. Drugs education sessions focus on the consequences that substance misuse can have on
peoples’ housing prospects. Young people are encouraged to engage positively with agencies providing support, without promoting dependency.

The London Connection report a worrying tendency for some statutory services to refer young people to them because of the wide range of specialist services and expertise they offer, and in doing so exposing young people to a street culture it would be better to avoid. They would prefer to be seen as an agency of last resort rather than the first point of contact for newly homeless or young people at risk.

When they are contacted by young people with a connection outside the West End, London Connection try to find an agency in their home area which can help them and try to persuade them not to return to the West End. They are concerned that in the past agencies for homeless people have tended to give people ‘careers’ in homelessness, entering them into a system of hostels and temporary accommodation with the unrealistic hope that they will eventually graduate with a flat of their own.

While it would be neither possible nor desirable to force young people to return to their families or home areas, London Connection can explore the best options with the young person. This involves explaining to the young person the difficulties of finding a hostel bed, let alone a flat, in central London and discussing with them whether they can return to a family home. They also explore the possibility of staying with other relatives, as this helps to maintain their family and social support, rather than entering a hostel and the homelessness system. If there has been a fairly straightforward dispute with their family, they will offer to contact their parents direct. If the problem is more complex and mediation is possible, they refer people to the Alone in London Service or Magnet for specialist help. They also explore the possibilities of the young person staying with friends or relatives, if only as a short term emergency option. Users are referred to the Alone in London Service for specialist mediation where this is possible. Each young person has a personal action plan which also serves as a means of monitoring the agency’s performance.

New Horizon Youth Centre
New Horizon is a day centre in London’s Kings Cross for young people who are homeless or vulnerable. Many are involved in the sex industry or have multiple substance abuse problems. They also work with young people from the local community who are at risk of becoming homeless, often helping them with support and family mediation to prevent them leaving home too early. Although they help a high proportion of homeless young people, they emphasise that they are a youth centre rather than a homelessness centre. The distinction is important because it highlights the holistic approach to a young person’s needs rather than labelling them as homeless.

They operate both as a drop-in centre and through street outreach. Most referrals come by word of mouth through young people themselves. The drop-in style of work is seen as essential with vulnerable young people. On-site services are also provided by the careers service, probation, family mediation and returning home projects. Those who come in for advice receive an immediate assessment with follow-up advice and support.

New Horizon’s starting point is to look at options for returning home. Where limited short term mediation might be effective they can contact parents. They also explore the possibilities of the young person staying with friends or relatives, if only as a short term emergency option. Users are referred to the Alone in London Service for specialist mediation where this is possible. Each young person has a personal action plan which also serves as a means of monitoring the agency’s performance.

Colchester Youth Enquiry Service
Colchester Y.E.S. runs an information and counselling service for young people aged 11 to 25. They have a wide catchment area, taking referrals from dispersed rural communities as well as local towns. Around three quarters of their clients are aged under 18.

The great majority of their casework is with homeless young people who need crisis intervention. They try to encourage young people to re-establish contact with their parents and will open dialogue with parents if necessary.
They do some family mediation work but do not have the resources to offer an intensive service and do not advertise this as a service. In practice, they find only a very small proportion of homeless young people do return to their family home. More commonly, they find leaving home often eases the tensions between the young person and their parents and enables them to then build bridges with their family.

Most of their case work is task-centred to resolve the immediate crisis and then they refer young people on to specialist agencies for longer term support, including their own regulated counselling service. There is a waiting list for this, being the only free counselling service for young people in the area.

Cardinal Hume Centre

Among its range of services the Cardinal Hume Centre runs a drop-in centre for young people who range from the newly homeless to established rough sleepers. Young people come mainly by word of mouth and staff assess all their needs including housing, education, employment and benefits. They find that in nine out of ten cases family arguments are the immediate cause of homelessness among their users. The centre’s location in central London attracts young people from all over the country and they are often interested in returning home. The centre refers to specialist agencies for help with this. They find that it is important to catch people within their first three months in London and that after that there is a danger they have become involved in street culture.

When they are approached by young people who are still at home, their first step is a ‘reality check’ looking at the difficulties of finding accommodation in central London and how they would pay for all the bills. When young people realise the difficulties, they often decide to stay at home for longer.

Cardinal Hume Centre believes that many of their users could potentially benefit from family mediation if it focuses on resolving practical problems. Where appropriate they refer users to specialist agencies for mediation services. However, many people are wary of involvement with anything that might be seen as ‘counselling’ and they are careful to emphasise that mediation is a different process. Ideally, such interventions should start at an earlier age – perhaps 12 or 13 – when family conflicts are emerging.

St Basil’s Family Mediation Project

St Basil’s runs a wide range of services for homeless young people in Birmingham and has run a Family Mediation Project since 1994. Their work has been independently evaluated (O’Sullivan, 2001).

They run weekly drop-in sessions in accommodation projects and satellite services in external agencies including social services, probation and The Big Issue. Referrals are aided by a common needs assessment and confidentiality protocol between agencies in Birmingham. This enables a free flow of information.

In their experience, family mediation needs to be user-led and to be clear that it is the young person who is the client of the agency. Young people are involved in the design of services. They are very flexible both in their objectives and in their methods. Young people often need an intermediary to make the initial contact because they fear they may be rejected once again. Returning home is not necessarily the best outcome from mediation and indeed happens in only a small minority of cases. In many instances, mediation may be aimed at establishing a family support network to help the young person live independently. It is important to identify who might form part of this network. It may not be their parents, but perhaps siblings, grandparents or family friends. St Basil’s also play an important role in tracing and making contact with lost parents and other relatives. They find that where there is no hope of improving their relationship with parents, then contacts with other family members becomes even more important to the young person.

Where young people have other serious problems, such as drug abuse, they refer them to other specialist agencies.

Parents often have serious problems themselves and St Basil’s work is sometimes seen as family support, as much as mediation. Where parents do have problems, they steer them towards other agencies which can provide support. If appropriate, St Basil’s use family conferences.
and written agreements between parents and young people, but written agreements are used as a working tool rather than a fixed document.

They have developed experience in providing a specialised mediation service for young British Asian and British African-Caribbean people, which is sensitive to different cultural and religious traditions. For example, they find that Asian women often have particular problems. They may reject some aspects of their own culture, but miss other elements of it because they have been ostracised. In many circumstances family mediators who are themselves Asian and who speak Asian languages are essential, although on occasions the parents might be alienated by someone from their own community becoming involved in sensitive family matters.

Operating both hostel and family mediation services, it is apparent to St Basil’s that mediation workers can adopt a more supportive and non-judgemental role than hostel staff whose work necessarily involves elements of discipline and control (O’Sullivan, 2001). This suggests the need to keep these two functions separate.

They recognise the importance of setting boundaries to their work and of being clear when they are unable to achieve any more with a young person and their family.

The evaluation of their work identified an important outcome as the personal development of young people, enhancing their self-confidence and self-reliance, even if reconciliation with their family is not achieved (O’Sullivan, 2001).

**NCH Mediation Action Project**

This NCH project works with 16–18 year old homeless young people, providing a family mediation service and solution focused counselling. They offer a drop-in service for easy access.

An initial assessment is carried out which is wide ranging and open ended because there are so many different circumstances experienced by young people. Then a variety of services are offered, including mediation if there is a possibility of returning to the family home. An action plan is agreed with the young person.

Family disputes are not just with parents, but often involve siblings as well. Some young people have been placed in temporary accommodation after applying as homeless to the local authority. In these cases, parents may say that their child is not really homeless and there may be scope for them to return home.

After the initial interview, the great majority come back for further help. Around 80 per cent have some form of support, counselling or personal coaching and around 40 per cent have mediation. All young people can also still drop in for ad hoc help.

Many have had a history of poor attendance at school and the project also works on employment and training opportunities with them.

The aim of the mediation service is to help reduce youth homelessness by providing mediation and individual solution focused support to young people and their families who are experiencing family conflict and who want to work to reduce or resolve it. Voluntary referrals are accepted from the social services.

Sessions look at what each party wants, the way forward and what immediate issues they need to resolve. For example, they might deal with the young person respecting their parents, in return for not being talked down to, or practical matters such as smoking in the home and staying out late. In general they offer up to eight sessions of up to an hour each. They often have a written understanding at the end of each session setting down what everyone has agreed to do. If any action is proposed, it is spelt out exactly how it will be done. For example, if the young person has broken a window, how they will go about getting it mended. Agreements also include what the project will do. However, the main emphasis is on what the family can do for themselves. The agreement can then be reviewed at the next session.

Personal coaching is also offered on practical problems such as going to college and producing a career plan. This focuses on practical improvements in young people’s lives and is found to be particular useful with, for example, young men who do not want to discuss personal problems.
It is found that around 60 per cent of young people eventually go back to their families, after they have been helped with their problems.

**The Home and Away Project**

Home and Away works in the inner-London borough of Lambeth and provides a specialist crisis intervention and family mediation service working with children and young people aged 13 to 20. Most users are self-referrals who have heard of them by word of mouth. The local authority Homeless Persons Unit refers young people aged under 18 to them.

They operate a drop-in service and whoever is on duty takes on the case immediately so that there is no wait for appointments, or for the case to be allocated. In a crisis they aim to respond within two hours. If a young person tells them they are about to be thrown out of home, workers can visit parents with them. They try to get young people to look at staying at home, or returning there, and to involve the family in dialogue if the young person agrees.

If a young person cannot return home straight away, Home and Away have access to emergency and respite accommodation, including supported lodgings and emergency foster carers, in addition to hostels. They also explore the possibilities of going to stay with another family member as this is usually better than going to a hostel. Even staying with friends is found to be preferable in many instances. The great majority of young people want to stay in the local area.

Their family mediation service works on the solution focused brief therapy model and they offer between six and eight sessions of around an hour each. The intervention lasts for a maximum of eight weeks. The aim is to encourage families to find their own solutions and focus on positive ideas. They also deal with finding solutions to practical problems. If longer term therapy is needed, they refer to other specialist agencies.

They also work on young people’s longer term housing needs, often along with their parents. The prospect of longer term housing opportunities can help to stabilise their relationships with their parents.

They have found that although outreach work in schools can help to identify some young people at risk, there is generally a need to reach families at an earlier stage: children often start exhibiting problems at 13 or 14.

They have developed a clear system for monitoring case profiles and outcomes. They distinguish between cases dealt with by the Crisis Service and those who had just a single session. Of 316 Crisis Service cases in the year to March 2000, 44 per cent were young people in a family crisis, 52 per cent were already homeless and five per cent were young runaways. For nearly half (47 per cent) of those in a family crisis, the crisis was resolved and a further 18 per cent were now living in another safe place. For those who were homeless, 15 per cent returned home and 49 per cent were now living in another safe place. These outcomes underline the effectiveness of intervention while young people are still at home, if those at risk can be identified. But they also show that even where the young person is already homeless, it is possible to achieve a reconciliation and return home in a significant minority of cases.

**Alone in London Service (ALS)**

Over half of young people in contact with ALS cite family breakdown as the major cause of their homelessness and a similar proportion want to repair damaged family relationships. ALS find that young people and their families can easily slip into a cycle of accusation and recrimination that can result in the young people leaving home. Their experience suggests that there is more scope for helping young people to stay in the family home rather than leaving in a crisis.

The service helps young people avoid irretrievable family breakdown and the risk of homelessness by working with them and their family to resolve disputes and reach mutually agreed courses of action. They also help young people who are already homeless, or in care, who want to re-establish positive contact with their families. They find that some young people who have recently left home regret the move, but do not feel they can ask their parents to take them back because of the loss of face.

They operate a drop-in service and also have satellite services working in locally based
agencies such as youth clubs. There is a much better take up of the service where it is offered on a drop-in basis than when it is appointment based. They also do group work in schools which helps to identify some young people at risk. They find that although some generalist agencies say that they offer family mediation, in practice they are not in a position to provide a sufficiently detailed and specialist service.

Other agencies, including some hostels, are sometimes reluctant to refer young people because they believe that there is hardly ever any prospect of them returning home, or because they think that family mediation aims at immediate reconciliation.

Early action is vital and there is a higher chance of success if young people are in contact before they have left or, if not, within a week or so of leaving. ALS are developing services aimed at younger people from 12 upwards, with the aim of tackling family difficulties before they reach a crisis.

A pair of trained volunteer mediators work together with each young person. The volunteers are given an intensive twelve week training programme. ALS believe that there are positive advantages in using volunteers, because they can be seen as neutral by the young person’s parents, whereas ALS may be seen as representing the interests of the young people.

There are several possible stages to the process, depending on the needs of the young person:

- First, the mediators have one-to-one sessions with the young person to talk about the problems they are experiencing. Together they develop a strategy to try to resolve the problems.

- Some people may need only one or two meetings with mediators to explore the problems and decide on ways of dealing with them. For other more difficult cases, when the young person is ready the mediators contact the family to see if they are willing to engage in mediation.

- The mediators then meet separately with each of the parties. This can be a lengthy process as the mediators relay messages between the young person and their family.

- Once the young person and their family feel ready, the mediators arrange a meeting between them.

The mediation also works on a brief therapy model which identifies the specific problems on which young people and their families want to work. It does not aim to resolve deep rooted, long term problems for which more intensive support is necessary. Longer term and other practical support is available through other ALS services and referral to specialist agencies.

The mediators also offer indirect support by for example, helping young people to write letters to their parents, rather than being directly involved in contacts.

Out of 131 young people who engaged in mediation in 2000/1, 39 (30 per cent) returned to or remained in their family home, or with relatives or friends.

There is a need for respite and emergency accommodation as part of a package of mediation services. ALS run a Safe Stop project which provides crisis accommodation for young people on the streets, with help to return to their home communities or to find alternative solutions.

Even relatively short returns home can help to stabilise the young person’s life. For example, they might stay at home for another six or nine months to finish off their education.

ALS also run a joint project, Magnet, with two other agencies, New to London and Borderline. This helps young people who have roots outside London to return to their home areas. Family mediation forms a central part of this service. Of the 150 young people who had used the service up to June 2000, 44 per cent used the family mediation service. 14 per cent of all cases returned to their family home and a further 17 per cent re-established contact with their families.
Appendix 2. Tables – interviews with homeless young people

Table 1 Reasons for leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1st time per cent</th>
<th>Last time per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following an argument</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems at school</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with police</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems – friends</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-parent/parent’s partner</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of drugs</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems – girl/boyfriend</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Base)</td>
<td>(149)</td>
<td>(150)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Recurrent leavers’ reasons for leaving, first and last time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1st time per cent</th>
<th>Last time per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Following an argument</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hitting</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems at school</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems with police</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems – friends</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step-parent/parent’s partner</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of drugs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems – girl/boyfriend</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Base)</td>
<td>(83)</td>
<td>(83)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Left home following an argument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>per cent</th>
<th>(base)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once only leavers</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>(66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent (1st time)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>(83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurrent (last time)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>(83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (1st time)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>(149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All (last time)</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>(149)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 Truancy and exclusion from school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>per cent</th>
<th>(base)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truanted</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>(148)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truanted often/very often</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>(148)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>(141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded more than once</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 Problems at school given as a reason for leaving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of problem</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truancy</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive behaviour</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not interested/bored</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disliked teachers/regime</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties with schoolwork</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Base)</td>
<td>(70)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Experience of institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In care</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young offenders/prison</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric unit</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital for three months or more</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs unit</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Base)</td>
<td>(150)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 Number of times left home

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of times</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once only</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three to five times</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six times or more</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Base)</td>
<td>(149)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8  Asked to leave or left voluntarily 1st time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>1st time (once only)</th>
<th>1st time (recur rent)</th>
<th>1st time (all)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked/told to go</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own accord</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of both</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went into care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(65)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(81)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(145)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9  Asked to leave or left voluntarily last time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Last time (all)</th>
<th>Last time (recur rent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked/told to go</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own accord</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix of both</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Went into care</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(145)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(83)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10  Age first left home – once only and recurrent leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Once only</th>
<th>1st left (recur rent)</th>
<th>1st left (all)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>per cent</td>
<td>per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up to 15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>18–21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(66)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(83)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(149)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11  Age first left home by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Men per cent</th>
<th>Women per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>up to 15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–21</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(94)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(55)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12  Negative feelings about leaving home last time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sad/unhappy</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraught/upset</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not want to</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angry</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared/worried</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurt/rejected</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No choice</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hated myself</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(117)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13  Positive feelings about leaving home last time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relief/glad</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence/freedom</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best thing for all</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excited</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(65)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14  Positive reasons for returning home the first time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Own initiative</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed home</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent encouraged</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others encouraged</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Base)</strong></td>
<td><strong>(43)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 15  Negative reasons for returning home the first time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nowehere else to go</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold/hungry/sleeping rough</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken home (police/parent/social worker)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely/scared</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 16  Help to return after left first time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped by</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social worker</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parties</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No help</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>83</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 17  What happened when returned home after first left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Same problems/hostile atmosphere</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems recurred after short time</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcomed back/stabilized for longer time</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 18  Reasons would not return home after last left

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better off not there/too damaging</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would not work out</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent now</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not ready</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No home left</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>105</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 19  Advice would give to others in similar circumstances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Get help</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort it out, do not leave</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find accommodation/have a plan</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go for independence</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide what’s best for you</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>140</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 20  Services received from agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing advice</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General advice/support</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment/training advice</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Befriending</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills training</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job search</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling/mentoring</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>75</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 21  How easy to talk to staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How easy</th>
<th>Agency clients per cent</th>
<th>Hostel clients per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very easy</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly easy</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very easy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all easy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some easier than others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

APPENDIX 2. TABLES – INTERVIEWS WITH HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE
Appendix 3. Research methods

**Interviews with homeless young people**
Structured interviews were carried out with 150 young people who had become homeless after having to leave their family home because of problems there.

The sample was divided into two:

- 75 interviews with people who were currently in contact with nine agencies working with homeless young people and whose services include family mediation (agency sample). Five agencies were in central London, three in the Midlands and one in East Anglia.

- 75 interviews with residents of 11 hostels which target single homeless young people as their client group (hostel sample). Nine of the hostels were in central London and one, a foyer, was in Shropshire.

For each set of interviews, a random sample was drawn among clients who met our criteria: people aged up to 25 who first became homeless after having had to leave their parental or family home in the UK or Ireland. A broad definition of homelessness was used and not confined to current or former rough sleepers. The samples included people who:

- left by their own decision, but under discordant or difficult circumstances
- had more than one episode of leaving, but had returned to their family home either to live or visit since they first left
- had been in other accommodation since leaving their family home
- had been in care, but later returned to their family home.

The samples excluded people who had left their family home on amicable terms, and also refugees and asylum seekers because of the very different circumstances of their homelessness.

Filter questions were used to check that respondents met our research criteria and that they had not already been interviewed for this survey at another hostel or agency.

The purpose of the two samples was to make comparisons between young people who had access to mediation services and those who had not. In the event, only a small proportion (17 per cent) of the agency sample were actively engaged with mediation and 9 per cent were receiving help to make contact with their families. Both sets of interviews explored:

- why people had left home and their experiences of leaving
- the household composition at the time
- whether they had any previous episodes of leaving
- any help or support they had received to resolve conflicts
- any help or support that might have prevented them leaving
- whether they currently wanted any help or support to return home, or to improve relationships with their family.

People who had left their family home more than once were asked a similar series of questions about the first time they had left.

In total, 161 young people who met our research criteria were invited to take part in the survey. Seven people declined, three proved unsuitable to interview for various reasons and one failed to keep an interview appointment. This represents a very high response rate of 93 per cent.

**Profile of respondents**
The hostel sample had higher proportions of women, Black ethnic groups and people aged under 18 and over 22 than the agency sample (Appendix 3, tables 1, 2 and 3 below). This reflects the known profile of central London hostels for homeless young people. However there were no significant differences between the samples in the family problems they reported which caused them to leave home, the support they had received or the extent to which they were willing to return to their family home.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Gender by sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Agency per cent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Base)</td>
<td>100 (75)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the event, only a small proportion (17 per cent) of the agency sample were actively engaged with mediation and 9 per cent were receiving help to make contact with their families. Both sets of interviews explored:

- why people had left home and their experiences of leaving
- the household composition at the time
- whether they had any previous episodes of leaving
- any help or support they had received to resolve conflicts
- any help or support that might have prevented them leaving
- whether they currently wanted any help or support to return home, or to improve relationships with their family.

People who had left their family home more than once were asked a similar series of questions about the first time they had left.
Table 2  Current age range by sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range</th>
<th>Agency per cent</th>
<th>Hostel per cent</th>
<th>All per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16–17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–21</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22+</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (75)</td>
<td>100 (75)</td>
<td>100 (150)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3  Ethnic group by sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Agency per cent</th>
<th>Hostel per cent</th>
<th>All per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White – UK</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White – Irish</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White – other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – African</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – Caribbean</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – British</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black – other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed race</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100 (75)</td>
<td>100 (75)</td>
<td>100 (150)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews for the agency sample were carried out at:

Alone in London Service
Cardinal Hume Centre
Colchester Youth Enquiry Service
Homeless at Risk Project (HARP), Rugby
New Horizon Youth Centre
South Birmingham Young Homeless Project
South Shropshire Young Persons Housing Project
St Basil’s Family Mediation Project
The Home and Away Project
The London Connection

The hostel interviews took place at:

Bina Gardens
Cardinal Hume hostel
Centrepoint – Berwick Street
Centrepoint – Vauxhall
Lena Fox House
Look Ahead – Bayswater
Ludlow foyer

Interviews with agency staff
Staff from 12 agencies providing mediation services to young people were interviewed in depth, using a topic guide. These agencies and the services they provide which are relevant to this report are summarised in Appendix 1.


O’Sullivan, A. (2000) The Rent, the Rent the Rent – That’s all they Care About! A study into the Family Mediation Support for Young Homeless People in Birmingham, Staffordshire University.


Safe in the City (2000) Summary Business Plan, Safe in the City.


Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who contributed to this report, particularly the young people who agreed to be interviewed about the difficulties in their family life.

We would like to thank the staff of the agencies we interviewed, too many to name here, but whose prevention work is summarised in Appendix 1. The staff of the hostels listed in Appendix 2 were extremely helpful in identifying which of their residents met our research criteria and making it possible for us to interview them.

We would like to thank our skilled interviewers: Helen Austerberry, Christy Billings, Peter Breed, Marion Hoffman and Joyce Virgo.

About the authors

The research was carried out on behalf of Crisis by Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown of Research and Information Services, Stanley House, 48 Castle Street, Eye, Suffolk, IP23 7AW.
Telephone & fax: 01379 870376.
Crisis’ New Solutions research programme is dedicated to identifying the major problems facing homeless people and suggesting innovative responses, designed to enable practical, long-term responses to homelessness.

Other titles in the New Solutions series:

Healthy Hostels: A Guide to Promoting Health and Well-being Among Homeless People
Teresa Hinton, Naomi Evans and Keith Jacobs
ISBN 1 899257 47 0 2001 40pp £7.50
How can housing, resettlement and health workers promote the health and well-being of homeless people? What are the most effective ways of working and what resources do they need? This is the first guide to comprehensively explore health promotion work with homeless people and begin to answer these questions. It represents a unique attempt to bring together the experience and knowledge gained through current work, with ideas for developing future work with this population. It contains a wealth of material and information and practical examples of health promotion activities. It also outlines the principles of good practice and offers valuable insights into how housing providers can gear up and become more effective in this area.

The guide will provide readers with a number of new insights into the diverse range of initiatives and activities that have come to be known as health promotion and provide a greater understanding of the scope for action.

Lest We Forget – Ex-servicemen and homelessness
Scott Ballintyne and Sinead Hanks
ISBN 1 899257 46 2 2000 36pp £7.50
Up to one in five hostel residents and nearly one in three rough sleepers have been in the Armed Forces. This bald statistic shocks now just as it did five years ago.

So, what has happened since then? What have the Armed Forces done to stop ex-squaddies put their training to sleep rough into practice? Have the dozens of ex-Service organisations been able to weave an effective safety net? And does the homelessness sector even recognise someone’s background in the Forces as a relevant factor?

A Future Foretold – New Approaches to Meeting the Long-term Needs of Single Homeless People
Gerard Lemos with Gill Goodby
ISBN 1 899257 35 7 1999 48pp £7.50
This highly influential report states that homelessness is the symptom of a multitude of life problems rather than people not having anywhere to live. The author argues that, although homelessness is not a new phenomenon, its causes, characteristics and consequences change frequently and that work done by the government, and voluntary agencies needs to reflect this changing landscape.
The authors argue that multiple causes can make homelessness a future foretold for some people. It makes recommendations to address the barriers currently facing single people in housing need.

**Leaving Homelessness Behind – New Solutions for a New Age**

Oswin Baker  
ISBN 1 899257 41 1  1999  20pp  £3.50  
This booklet sets out Crisis’ key pledges and proposals which could make homelessness a thing of the past. Through empowerment and the forging of links both between people and within support systems, Crisis believes that the next century can see us learning from the mistakes of the past.

**Prevention is Better than Cure**

Geoffrey Randall and Susan Brown  
ISBN 1 899257 33 0  1999  54pp  £6.50  
Recently described by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation as “the key study on the prevention of homelessness”, this report is based on structured interviews with 120 homeless people. The authors explain the causes of homelessness and recommend a programme of measures aimed at reducing the risk of vulnerable people ending up on the streets. Examples include young people, those leaving the armed forces or prison and anyone experiencing mental health problems.
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<th>Quantity</th>
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<td>TAH/01/P/082</td>
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<td>HHH/01/P/082</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Walk on By</td>
<td>WOB/00/P/082</td>
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<td>HL/00/P/082</td>
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<td>A Future Foretold</td>
<td>FFT/99/P/082</td>
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<td>LHB/99/P/082</td>
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<td>£3.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevention is Better than Cure</td>
<td>PBC/99/P/082</td>
<td></td>
<td>£6.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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