



The role of housing and housing providers in tackling poverty experienced by young people in the UK Summary and Conclusions

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Aims & Objectives

This project was funded by the **Economic and Social Research Council and the Public Policy Institute for Wales** as part of their programme of research on what works in tackling poverty.

The research was conducted from 2014 to 2016. It aimed to identify measures that work in tackling poverty amongst young people (16 to 25 year olds) who do not live in the parental home, with a focus on housing services and the role that housing providers can play. It examined new and innovative practice and sought to investigate the feasibility of implementing such measures across the UK.

The research also sought information from other countries about schemes that can prevent or alleviate poverty through positive impacts on individual well-being.

Methods

The research used three strands of evidence

1

An evidence review of housing interventions tackling poverty amongst young people in the UK and abroad, supported by information from housing providers in Europe

2

Quantitative analyses of housing and youth poverty in the UK drawing on secondary datasets

3

New evidence from ten case studies of housing providers who are undertaking innovative new work addressing youth poverty in different parts of the UK

Findings

Summary and conclusions

Whilst few housing providers in the UK consider reducing poverty to be an explicit goal, many of the support services offered by housing organisations and their partners may reduce poverty amongst young people as a by-product of activities designed to increase independence and employment prospects.

Most social landlords with more than a few properties help their tenants in a variety of ways beyond the provision of housing. However, the literature publicly available that includes evaluations of projects aiming to help young people in poverty is sparse. Evidence of impact rarely goes beyond stating the project's scale and intended goals.

Learning from elsewhere

Throughout Europe housing market pressures, low incomes and unemployment are resulting in young people staying longer with parents, and in difficulties in forming new independent households in both the homeownership and rented housing sectors. There are a variety of approaches throughout Europe, including Foyers in France and the Netherlands, which combine housing provision with learning, working and coaching support to improve employment prospects. Examples from Ireland include a childcare scheme set up by lone parents and supported by a housing association, and a project aimed at 18-35 year olds with kickstart funding for co-op enterprise models; housing associations help find members and funders. Trial tenancies for 18-26 year olds are offered as part of initiatives in Sweden, and 'tenancy training' support is offered as well as assistance with work and training.

The variety of approaches across Europe mirrors the range of initiatives in the UK, though often takes a wider view of young people with the inclusion of students in many countries.

Ways of working with young people

In the UK projects that help young people may not be exclusively aimed at them. For example, projects aiming to help vulnerable single parents may not be explicitly restricted to young people, but nevertheless cater largely for that group in practice. Our analysis suggests that there are three main ways housing providers address poverty amongst young people.

- 1 They run schemes to help people improve their incomes by finding work or gaining qualifications to enable them to find better-paid work
- 2 They help young people manage their incomes better
- 3 They can reduce the costs of housing provision by for example providing shared housing or subsidised rents.

Many projects run by housing providers have the potential to prevent or alleviate poverty amongst young people by improving personal skills, employability, confidence and the ability to maintain independent living.

The data getting in and out of poverty

The quantitative analysis undertaken suggests that getting out of poverty is, for young people, often associated with other changes in their circumstances. **Education, qualifications, employment, independence and mobility, in the broadest sense of the term, can all be part of the route out of poverty.** Actions initiated by housing providers that promote such changes are therefore likely to help alleviate or prevent poverty.

The longitudinal analysis, tracking young people over time, strongly suggests that qualifications can help get young people out of poverty. As each ascending qualification level is reached, the percentage not in poverty rises and the percentage in poverty falls. **A focus on helping young people to gain higher qualifications is therefore very likely to reduce poverty.**

Staying in poverty can be associated with being a lone parent and getting out of poverty with becoming part of a couple. Among young people who escaped poverty from 2001 to 2011 almost one in ten households had been a lone parent in 2001, but by 2011 four out of five of these had become members of a couple.

Getting out of poverty can be associated with spatial mobility and mobility between tenures. Over time, young people who are in poverty are less spatially mobile than those who are not in poverty. The quantitative analysis shows that 16-25 year olds who are in poverty are much less likely to have moved than those not in poverty. Of those in poverty in 2001, less than half who were still in poverty in 2011 had changed household type since 2001, compared to more than four in five among those who were no longer in poverty by 2011.



Addressing poverty – examples from housing providers

Case studies from across the UK comprised several approaches by housing providers: **employability schemes, pre-tenancy training schemes, and supported housing schemes.** All of these have a part to play in preventing or reducing poverty amongst young people and all of the activities investigated within this research showed successes in preparing young people for work, improving their chances of independent living and acquiring better budget-management skills. Strategies that increase earnings and improve budgeting skills, in particular, offer great potential to equip young people to avoid future poverty.

For schemes to run effectively a number of conditions need to be in place. The **reputation and visibility of the organisations** organising and running the services for young people help build trust and good working relationships with referral agencies and potential clients.

Effective co-ordination between housing and other services (e.g. Citizen's Advice Bureaus, local colleges, council housing services and social services) can be critical.

Flexibility and individual tailoring help create the right balance of support and independence, and adjusting the support offered to the changing circumstances of tenants and allowing them to form partnerships and live together is highly valued by young people, and may help protect them from future poverty as couple households have much lower rates of poverty than single adult households.

Well-managed supportive shared housing can benefit mental health and wellbeing, as well as facilitating access to educational opportunities and other services.

Tenancy training courses help prepare young tenants for living independently and managing a tenancy. The evidence suggests they work best when they promote an informal, **relaxed learning environment that is not like a classroom,** and also have **strong links to referral agencies (such as social services) and to housing providers;** making a course a requirement for accessing social housing encourages attendance.

The role of housing providers

Housing providers play a valuable role as co-ordinators (or as the organisations that make the connections that brings services together). However, **all the schemes investigated faced challenges to their financial viability and sustainability.** There are in all cases limits to what housing providers can do from their own resources.

The quantitative analysis confirms the value of the focus of many of the case study schemes studied on training and education, as this will help young people escape poverty in the longer term. The research also identifies multiple successes and challenges that are demonstrated by each of the case studies. However, the investigation has shown **a lack of evaluation of outcomes by the scheme providers or funders.** There are very few examples where there have been detailed evaluations of results against explicit criteria.

There are, despite this lack of long-term quantifiable indications of success from self-evaluation by the project organisations, **many examples of activities that because of their perceived value by providers, young people and referral agencies could be usefully replicated elsewhere.**

The research has shown that in financial terms, none of the schemes investigated were cheap. **Most initiatives worked with small numbers of young people and had high costs per client,** though many of the clients were very vulnerable young people – such as care leavers and those who have left school with no qualifications – who are likely to need substantial support and investment to become self-sufficient.

Can we transfer good ideas to other areas?

The research explored the appropriateness of the initiatives to other locations. This depends on local employment, housing market and policy contexts, which vary across the UK.

For the initiatives illustrated in the case studies to be replicable elsewhere a number of conditions need to be in place. **The success of the schemes was dependent on the local services and networks of which they were a part, and the availability of funding.** Similar services would likely need to exist in the new area for the transfer to be successful, or alternatives (such as providing those services within the lead organisation) would need to be negotiated.



Furthermore, the success of some schemes was linked to the local housing market (such as the local market rents, or the cultural expectation of sharing); transferred schemes may find it easier in areas where the local housing market is similar.

Regional differences

Levels of youth unemployment vary across the UK. The higher percentage rates in Northern Ireland, North East England, North West England and Wales point to the particular applicability of education and skills promotion initiatives in these locations. The particularly high rents in London and South East England create specific challenges in addressing affordability and budget-management skills. However, whilst these contextual points are important, for young people in poverty, initiatives that, for example, improve employability and independent living skills are important wherever they live.

More significantly, the national and local policy contexts impose constraints, provide opportunities and promote the need for effective transfer of promising ideas. UK-wide welfare reforms since 2010 have had major impacts on young people who are unemployed or have low incomes. Limits to housing benefit for young people under 35 limit the affordability of rented accommodation in areas where rents are at their highest. Further restrictions to housing benefit from 2018 for young single people in social housing will create additional affordability problems. They will also increase the relevance of initiatives that respond by helping to make sharing more acceptable and workable for providers and young tenants.

Furthermore, 'supporting people' funding, which was introduced in 2003 to help vulnerable young people to live independently, has varied across the UK, with support ceasing from 2008 in Scotland and being cut back or ended in England in recent years. However, such support has continued in Northern Ireland and Wales. Homelessness policy also varies across the UK with the duties owed by local authorities to young people in the different jurisdictions differing considerably. These variations suggest that the help that young people receive from housing providers should be sensitive to both the opportunities and constraints arising from local policy contexts.

Conclusions

The case studies examined within this research show that the existence and location of projects that can prevent or mitigate the impact of poverty amongst young people are **not the result of a national or local strategy for poverty reduction amongst young people**. Instead, the initiatives involving housing providers are **often the result of local leadership and the vision of individuals who have responded to a set of perceived needs**. The **funding of these projects is usually ad hoc and short term**, with housing providers sometimes devoting their own funds to a scheme, though more often obtaining funding from a variety of sources including local authorities, charities and philanthropic support. **The ad hoc nature of the initiatives and the funding has important implications for both the sustainability of the individual schemes and the transferability of ideas to other locations.**

Housing organisations often take the lead in putting together a consortium of agencies that variously commit funds, personnel and ideas to produce a programme of activities that enhance the probability of poverty reduction amongst young people. Housing providers do this typically because no one else is taking the initiative. **For the activities of housing providers to be successful in poverty reduction they ideally need to be imbedded in a strategy that responds to local needs.** They also need to operate in a less risky environment where structures and resources are secure for several years.

The full findings from this research project are published on our website:

www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/Projects/Start-Year/2014/role-housing-housing-providers-tackling-poverty-experienced-young-people-UK

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