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**The prevalence and impact of housing  
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advice**

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Youth Access, August 2007

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## **Locked out: The prevalence and impact of housing & homelessness problems amongst young people, and the impact of good advice**

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*A desk research report drawing on exclusive data from:*

- i) The Legal Services Research Centre's Civil & Social Justice Surveys*
- ii) The independent evaluation of Youth Access' Rights to Access Project*
- iii) Legal aid contract reporting*

### **Summary**

- Housing and homelessness together represent the most common reason that disadvantaged young people present at services in general and at youth advice services in particular.
- Young people account for a disproportionate amount of rented housing and homelessness problems experienced by the population as a whole.
- Socially isolated young people, looked after young people, young people leaving care, young offenders, young people from some BME communities, drug users, LGBT young people and young people with mental health problems are particularly vulnerable to housing and homelessness problems.
- Young people are considerably less likely than other age groups to obtain advice with their homelessness problems.
- The impact of young people's housing and homelessness problems on individuals, wider society and public services is very substantial. Individuals can experience adverse consequences to their health and well-being, educational achievement, and involvement in society. Evidence linking homelessness with crime strengthens the economic case for investing in early intervention and prevention advice.
- Getting timely, good quality legal advice can bring young people experiencing housing problems enormous benefits across the five Every Child Matters outcomes.
- The legal aid system is failing to meet young people's needs for specialist advice.
- Government youth policy has, until now, largely ignored young people's housing and homelessness needs, but current initiatives offer the potential to make progress.

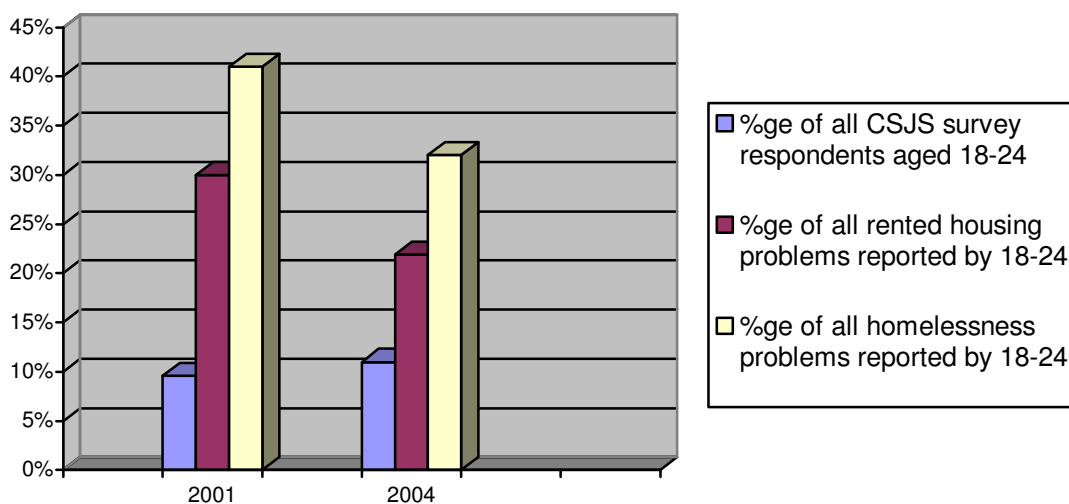
## **1. Young people's housing advice needs**

The Social Exclusion Unit has identified that housing and homelessness “are by far the most common reasons that the most disadvantaged young adults reach out to services”, accounting for 43% of first contact with services.<sup>1</sup> They are also the most common rights-based issues presented by young people to the services in Youth Access' membership, although there is some variation between areas and types of agency.<sup>2</sup> For the few specialist legal advice services for young people, housing and homelessness tend to represent the single largest area of work.<sup>3</sup>

Young people's housing experiences differ markedly from those of the rest of the population. Young people are far more likely to experience homelessness and to live in unstable rented accommodation than older age groups and there is a recognised problem of vulnerable young people being placed in unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

As can be seen in Figures 1, 2 and 3, young people account for a disproportionate amount of all the rented housing and homelessness problems reported by the Legal Services Research Centre (LSRC) from its Civil & Social Justice Surveys.<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 1:** The proportion of housing & homelessness problems affecting all ages that are reported by young people. (Data supplied to Youth Access by Legal Services Research Centre from 2001 and 2004 Civil & Social Justice Surveys)



Taking both the 2001 and 2004 surveys together, around a quarter of rented housing problems and a third of homelessness problems were reported by young people aged 18-24. In the 2001 survey, young people were seven times more likely to report a homelessness problem than the rest of the population.

<sup>1</sup> Findings from analysis of the 'Young Adults Questionnaire', as reported in *Transitions: Young Adults with Complex Lives*, final report, Social Exclusion Unit, November 2005.

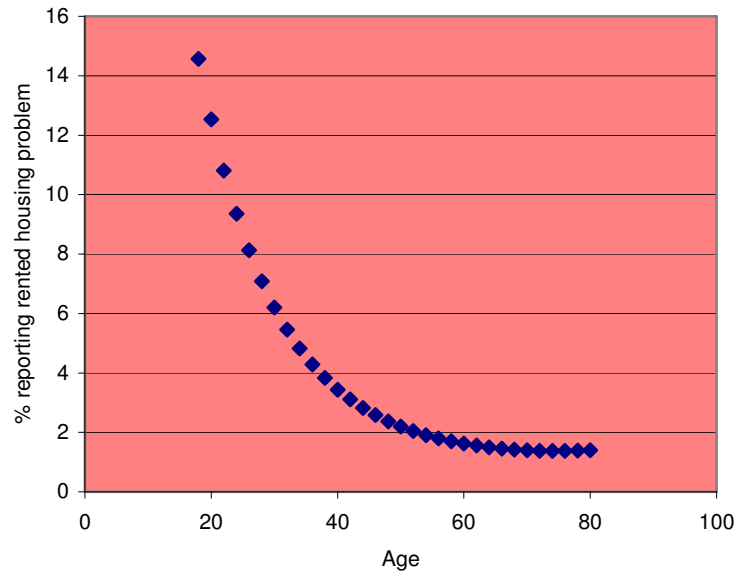
<sup>2</sup> Source: Youth Access membership surveys

<sup>3</sup> Source: Statistical returns from 'pilots' and 'good practice' agencies participating in Youth Access's Rights to Access Project

<sup>4</sup> As reported in *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice*, parts one and two, Legal Services Research Centre, 2004 and 2006.

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate a clear correlation between age and the probability of reporting problems, with probability falling steeply as age increases.

**Figure 2:** Age distribution of rented housing problems reported in 2004 Civil & Social Justice Survey.



Figures on young people’s housing tenures partly explain the prevalence of rented housing problems amongst young people that is indicated in Figure 2. Research in 2002 indicated that 77% of 16-25 year olds living independently live in rented accommodation – 44% in the private rented sector and 33% in social housing.<sup>5</sup>

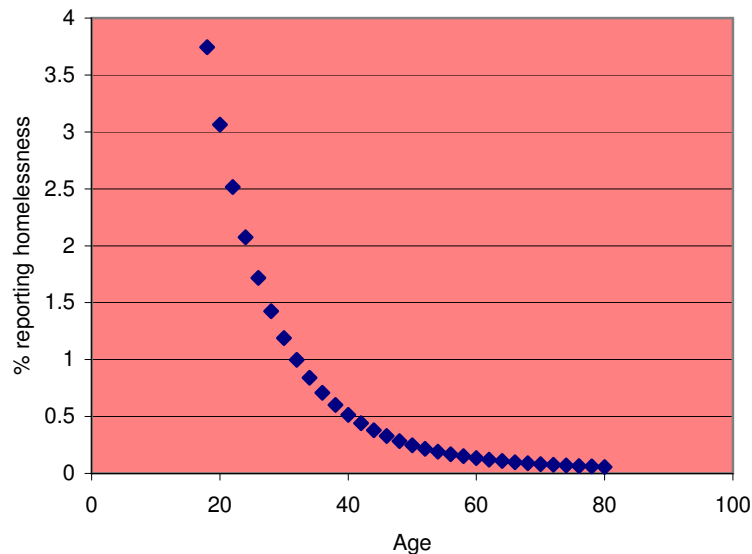
Agencies advising young people report the following as some of the most common rented housing problems:

- Getting money for rent deposits;
- Benefits and finances, including Housing Benefit, rent arrears and problems with budgeting;
- Issues with tenancies;
- Problems with landlords, including threats of and actual evictions (legal and illegal);
- Vulnerable young people being placed in unsuitable Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

Young people’s particular needs for advice on private sector rented housing issues often require more complex legal knowledge on the part of their advisers than youth workers tend to possess or than the “bread and butter” local authority work that most specialist housing advisers and lawyers are used to.

<sup>5</sup> *Young People, Housing and the Transition to Adult Life*, Economic and Social Research Council, 2002.

**Figure 3:** Age distribution of homelessness problems reported in 2004 Civil & Social Justice Survey.



The pattern of homelessness problems by age that is indicated in Figure 3 is reflected in the most recent government figures on homelessness, which indicate that 36,770 young people aged 16-24 were accepted by local authorities as homeless in 2005/06, 39% of the total.<sup>6</sup>

It should be noted that under 18 year olds were not included in the LSRC’s surveys. This younger group of young people is becoming increasingly significant amongst the overall population of those in housing need. The government’s figures on homelessness acceptances by priority need categories<sup>7</sup> show that 8,350 involved ‘applicant aged 16 or 17’, the third most common category after ‘dependent children’ and ‘pregnant woman’. This represents 9% of all homelessness acceptances and excludes those who were not accepted as homeless, e.g. due to a decision that they were intentionally homeless or because their homelessness did not even lead to an application to the local authority –scenarios that appear to disproportionately affect under 18s. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the disproportionate prevalence of housing and homelessness problems amongst young people is almost certainly far greater than that suggested by Figures 1, 2 and 3 or by the official homelessness figures.

Homelessness amongst young people is often linked to: breakdown in relationship with parents; fear of violence; overcrowding; substance abuse; “sofa surfing” (i.e. moving about between friends, grandparents and other family). There is also a clear link between the unresolved rented housing problems that young people experience and subsequent homelessness.

Youth advice agencies report that many of the problems they deal with are related to the routine failure of local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities under the Homelessness (Priority Need for Accommodation) (England) Order 2002, which extended automatic priority

<sup>6</sup> *Tackling Youth Homelessness: Policy Briefing 18*, Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

to homeless 16 and 17 year olds, and care leavers up to the age of 21. These young people are frequently deemed to be intentionally homeless following the breakdown of family relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Agencies have also reported that local authorities are routinely evicting unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors when they reach the age of 18, although the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 imposes a duty on local authorities to continue to accommodate such young people until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

## **2. Which groups of young people are affected?**

The most recent reports suggest that housing and homelessness first become an issue for vulnerable young people between the ages of 13 and 15, with 15 to 17 being the peak age for accommodation difficulties. Evidence from youth advice agencies strongly supports the notion that 15 to 17 is now the peak age for demand from young people for advice on housing and homelessness problems.

The LSRC have recently reported<sup>9</sup> that 'socially isolated' young people, defined as young people living in households with no one over the age of 24, are substantially more likely to experience both homelessness and rented housing problems. For example, 9% of socially isolated young people reported a homelessness problem in the most recent LSRC survey, compared to around 1% of other young people.

The Social Exclusion Unit<sup>10</sup> reported that young people leaving care and those looked after by the local authority represent 30 per cent of those in housing need. It also noted that one in three drug users is homeless or in need of housing support.

There is some evidence that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people are over-represented amongst the homeless population.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Shelter have identified that young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) communities tend to have greater needs and certain BME groups are reluctant to seek external help.<sup>12</sup>

A large proportion of young people who have offended have housing needs and this group is substantially more likely to be homeless.<sup>13</sup> The Social Exclusion Unit has reported that prisoners face severe difficulties accessing housing on release and that three-quarters of ex-prisoners are likely to depend on Housing Benefit for help with rent.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For further analysis of this issue, see *More Priority Needed*, Shelter, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> Legal Services Research Centre and Youth Access, 2007 op. cit.

<sup>10</sup> SEU, 2005, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *Out On My Own: Understanding the experiences and needs of homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth*, Mark Cull, Hazel Platzer and Sue Balloch, Health and Social Policy Research Centre, University of Brighton, 2006.

<sup>12</sup> See *The advice gap: A study of barriers to housing advice for people from black and minority ethnic communities*, Shelter, January 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See *Accommodation Needs and Experiences*, Youth Justice Board, 2007.

<sup>14</sup> *Reducing Re-offending by Ex-offenders*, Social Exclusion Unit, 2002.

Youth homelessness has also been linked to: mental health problems; childhood abuse; parents, relatives or friends being unable/unwilling to continue to accommodate; domestic violence (from parents, carers, partners); relationship breakdown; and debt.

### **3. Young people's advice-seeking 'success'**

Young people are substantially less likely to obtain appropriate professional advice when they experience a housing or homelessness problem than other age groups. This is particularly the case with homelessness problems.

In the 2001 Civil and Social Justice Survey, only 7% of young people who had experienced a homelessness problem obtained advice, compared to 77% of people aged 25 and over with similar problems. 73% of 18-24s had tried to obtain advice, failed and ended up having to handle their homelessness problems alone, indicating a disconcerting inability on the part of advice services to respond to this client group.<sup>15</sup>

Although the picture in the 2004 Civil and Social Justice Survey was better (44% of 18-24s obtained advice for homelessness problems), a majority of young people still failed to get advice for what is usually a severe and acute problem. People aged over 24 were again far more successful than young people in obtaining advice for their homelessness problems.<sup>16</sup>

Both surveys also showed that young people were far more likely than older age groups to have done nothing to resolve their homelessness problems. In 2004, 44% of 18-24s did nothing, compared to only 10% of over 24 year olds.<sup>17</sup> The Social Exclusion Unit have noted that

*"Young adults may also not know where to go for help, and lack the confidence to ask questions and seek advice and support."*<sup>18</sup>

### **4. The cost and impact of unresolved problems**

Housing and homelessness problems can impact very seriously on individuals and wider society. The provision of early intervention and prevention services can reduce such impact and save substantial public service costs further down the line.

In 2003 Crisis attempted to put a cost on single homelessness by costing out the impact on institutions in the public, private or voluntary sectors associated with a number of costed

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<sup>15</sup> See *Youth Access' annotated analysis of the Legal Services Research Centre's 2001 CSJS data*, Youth Access, 2004

<sup>16</sup> *Young People and Civil Justice: Findings from the 2004 English and Welsh Civil and Social Justice Survey*, Dr. Nigel J. Balmer, Tania Tam and Professor Pascoe Pleasence, Legal Services Research Centre and Youth Access, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Unpublished analysis by the Legal Services Research Centre of 2004 CSJS data for Youth Access.

<sup>18</sup> SEU, 2005, op.cit

case studies, which typically ran into tens of thousands of pounds over a 12 month period.<sup>19</sup> The study concluded that

*“there may be an economic case for spending money to reduce homelessness. Particular attention should be drawn to the scale and importance of recurring, time-related costs, such as the costs of temporary accommodation and the economic cost to society as a whole, of unemployment associated with homelessness.”*

Every time an adviser helps a client avoid homelessness they save the local authority the costs of re-housing. The Audit Commission estimates the monetary cost of a failed tenancy to be over £2,000, without taking account of the stress and anxiety experienced by the individual,<sup>20</sup> whilst the Housing Corporation has estimated the cost of a failed tenancy at between £4,000 and £10,500 per case, excluding health and social care costs.<sup>21</sup> The Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York, meanwhile, has estimated the cost of a failed tenancy at £2,800, the cost of processing a local authority homelessness application at £650 and the cost of a hostel bed at £400 per week.<sup>22</sup>

The LSRC has reported that young people’s social welfare problems, of which housing and homelessness are the most significant, often lead to loss of employment, loss of income, loss of home, loss of confidence and violence.<sup>23</sup> Socially isolated young people reported having to move home far more often than other groups, linking to incidence of rented housing and neighbour problems. Younger respondents were also found to spend somewhat more time than other age groups worrying about their problems. As many as 54% of socially isolated respondents spent either all or most of their time worrying about their problems.<sup>24</sup>

Outcomes monitoring conducted by advice agencies participating in Youth Access’ Rights to Access Project has found that social welfare problems invariably have some type of significant impact on young people’s lives. The most commonly reported adverse consequences appear to be stress and difficulties with enjoying and achieving in life. These are followed by problems with health and well being, barriers to studying or working, the absence of a comfortable and safe place to live and difficulties feeling involved and respected in society.<sup>25</sup>

A recent study into the housing needs of young people who have offended<sup>26</sup> reports that many of the 152 young people interviewed described a mixture of problems and anxieties when they were homeless, which ranged across physical and mental health and social issues:

- 31% said they had experienced poor physical health
- 66% felt depressed

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<sup>19</sup> *How Many, How Much? Single homelessness and the question of numbers and cost*, Crisis and New Policy Institute research report, September 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Cited in *Citizens Advice Provision – Independent Advice at the Core of Public Service*, Citizens Advice Cymru, 2005

<sup>21</sup> *Homelessness Prevention and Housing Associations – Contributing to Efficiency*, Housing Corporation, April 2006.

<sup>22</sup> *The Safe Moves Initiative: An Evaluation*, Deborah Quilgars et al., Centre for Housing Policy, University of York, September 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Legal Services Research Centre and Youth Access, 2007, op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Rights to Access Project: Interim Evaluation Summary Report for Youth Access*, Michael Bell Associates Research & Consultancy, January 2007.

<sup>26</sup> Youth Justice Board, 2007, op. cit.

- 48% felt hungry
- 39% felt lonely
- 21% were frightened of other people
- 15% had been a victim of crime

Homeless Link reports the following adverse consequences of homelessness:<sup>27</sup>

- Children in temporary accommodation miss out on a quarter of their schooling.
- More than half of homeless people want to engage in learning and skills development, but only a fifth do at present.
- The life expectancy of someone sleeping rough is estimated to be 42.
- Homeless households, in particular 'single homeless' and rough sleepers, have a higher prevalence of physical and mental health problems and the experience of homelessness often exacerbates problems.
- Lack of suitable accommodation or the cost of housing is a barrier to accessing employment reported by a third of single homeless people.

There is growing evidence of a link between homelessness and crime. The Social Exclusion Unit, indeed, has identified housing advice as a key intervention to prevent re-offending by ex-prisoners and has reported that stable accommodation can make a difference of 20% in terms of reduction in reconviction.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the LSRC has reported a problem cluster, predominantly affecting young people, that involves homelessness, unfair treatment by the police, action being taken against the respondent and rented housing problems:

*"The inclusion of problems relating to the police in the homelessness cluster stems from both problem types being most often experienced by young people in receipt of welfare benefits, and the increased vulnerability to police related problems that accompanies extended periods of time being spent on the streets and the social problems associated with the homeless population (e.g. alcohol and drug abuse)."*<sup>29</sup>

It follows that early intervention and prevention advice to help young people tackle their benefit, rented housing, homelessness and other related problems is likely to reduce offending and anti-social behaviour.

## **5. The impact of getting good advice – contribution to Every Child Matters outcomes**

Youth Access's Rights to Access Project (RAP) is attempting to identify successful models of advice for young people, as well as examining the benefits to individual young people of getting good quality targeted legal advice. Interim findings from the project's independent evaluation<sup>30</sup> indicate that integration of specialist legal advice within more generalist youth settings can lead to spectacular results.

<sup>27</sup> [www.homeless.org.uk](http://www.homeless.org.uk)

<sup>28</sup> SEU, 2002, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> *Causes of Action: Civil Law and Social Justice*, LSRC, 2004, op. cit.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Bell Associates Research & Consultancy, January 2007, op. cit.

The experiences of young people, many of whom have received advice on housing or homelessness problems, have been surveyed through an outcomes monitoring exercise and a longitudinal study.<sup>31</sup> Among other benefits identified, very high proportions of young people have reported improvements, as a result of the advice they received, in:

- their housing situation (75%);
- their safety (72%);
- their standard of living (80%);
- their understanding of their rights and responsibilities (96%);
- and their ability to deal with problems themselves (92%).

Other benefits reported include reductions in stress and depression, increased confidence and self-esteem, healthier eating, reduced drug use, better attendance at GPs, re-engagement with education, improved behaviour, and better personal and family relationships.

The Interim Evaluation Report by the RAP project's independent evaluators maps these benefits against the Every Child Matters outcomes – Being Healthy; Enjoying and Achieving; Making A Positive Contribution; Staying Safe; and Economic Well-being – and finds that legal advice can make a significant contribution across all five outcomes.<sup>32</sup>

The final evaluation report on the Rights to Access Project is due to be published in December 2007.

Despite the evidence that targeted legal advice can achieve excellent results, current structures and policies relating to legal aid and to services for young people have not been favourable to attempts to establish specialist housing advice services for young people, as the following sections will explore.

## **6. Legal aid inadequacies**

The Legal Services Commission lets legal aid contracts for housing advice to solicitors, Law Centres and a small number of other providers, such as Shelter. Despite the evidence that housing and homelessness problems disproportionately affect young people and that young people have very specific needs,<sup>33</sup> **none** of these housing contracts, as far as we are aware, requires the provider to work with young people.

Most housing contracts are held by private practice solicitors firms, yet only 0.4% of advisers and solicitors practising social welfare law in the private sector report that young people are one of the client groups they target (according to NOS4Advice Workforce Survey).<sup>34</sup> It is unlikely, therefore, that they have the specific skills required to work effectively with one of their most significant client groups.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

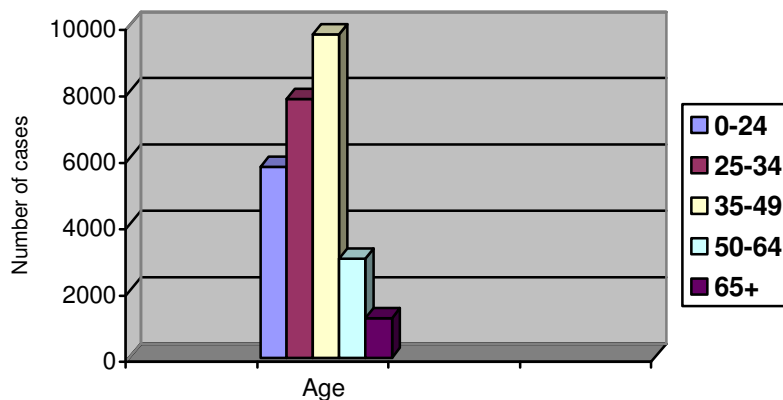
<sup>33</sup> See *Rights to Access: Meeting young people's needs for advice*, Youth Access, 2002 for a comprehensive analysis of need, advice-seeking behaviour and access issues.

<sup>34</sup> According to data analysed by Youth Access from the Workforce Survey conducted for the National Occupational Standards for the Legal Advice Sector

Youth Access has analysed data from over 50,000 social welfare legal aid cases conducted by Not for Profit (NfP) agencies (mainly Citizens Advice Bureaux and law centres) in 2004/05.

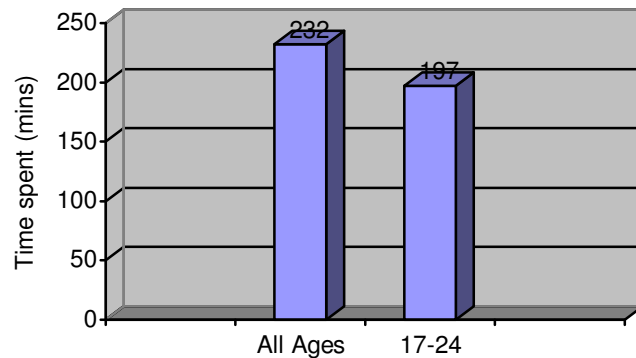
Figure 4 shows that the proportion of housing cases dealt with by NfP contract holders in no way reflects the incidence of need indicated earlier in Figures 1, 2 and 3. Far from young people making up the largest proportion of clients, they are outnumbered heavily by clients aged 25 to 49.

**Figure 4:** Numbers of housing legal aid cases by age of client (Legal Services Commission Contract Data on Not for Profit Agencies, analysed by Youth Access)



Further, analysis of case times shows that young people may not be getting a good deal when they do manage to get advice. Although other evidence suggests that it takes considerably longer to advise young people,<sup>35</sup> Figure 5 shows that NfP contract holders spend 15% less time (equivalent to 35 minutes less) on average on housing/homelessness cases where the client is aged under 25.

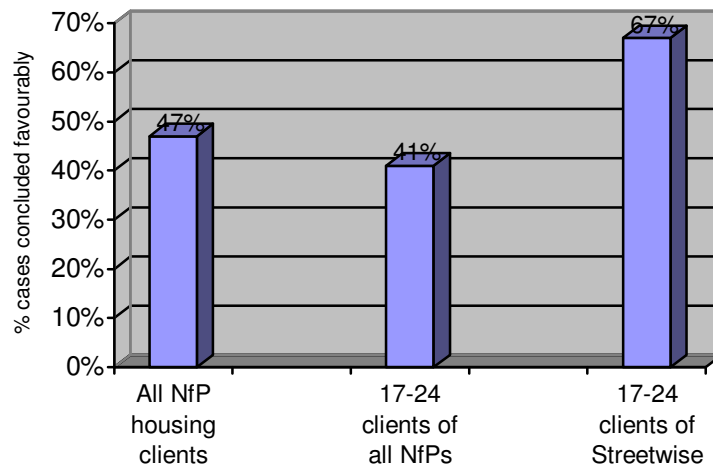
**Figure 5:** Time spent (mins) on young people's housing legal aid cases compared to all housing legal aid cases (Legal Services Commission Contract Data on Not for Profit Agencies, analysed by Youth Access)



<sup>35</sup> See, for example, *Legal aid is getting scarcer for the young*, The Times, 15<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

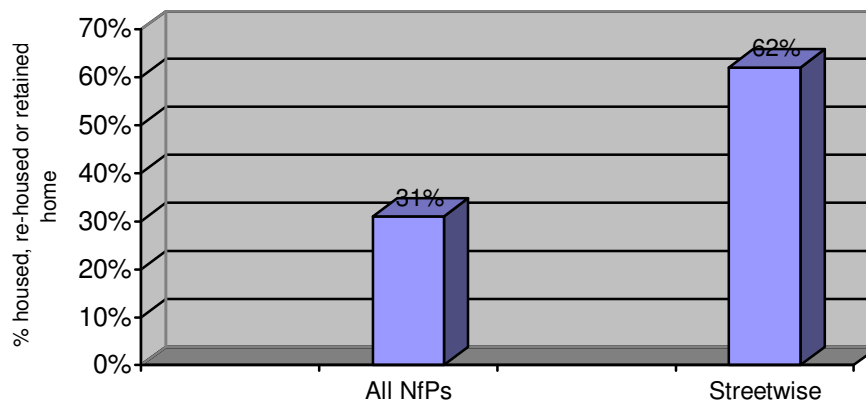
Moreover, Figure 6 shows that NfP agencies that don't specialise in YP also get worse outcomes for their youngest housing clients (41% of cases are concluded in 17-24 clients' favour vs. 47% of 25+ clients.)

**Figure 6:** Case Outcomes: Percentage of housing legal aid cases where matter concluded in clients' favour (Legal Services Commission Contract Data on Not for Profit Agencies, analysed by Youth Access)



Specialist legal advice services targeting this age group can achieve far better results (although they do tend to spend considerably longer on their cases). For example, 67% of housing and homelessness cases dealt with under a legal aid contract by Streetwise Community Law Centre, a specialist young person's law centre, were concluded in the client's favour. Figure 7 (below) shows that in 62% of Streetwise's cases, the outcome was classified as 'Client housed, re-housed or retained home', compared to in just 31% of all NfP housing cases where the client was aged 17-24.

**Figure 7:** Case Outcomes: Percentage of housing & homelessness cases where outcome is classified as 'Client housed, re-housed or retained home' (Legal Services Commission Contract Data on Not for Profit Agencies, analysed by Youth Access)



The Legal Services Commission currently has no plans to target legal aid to better meet the needs of young people and its proposed approach to future legal aid contracting, involving fixed fees equivalent to around 3 hours per case for housing work, will make it even more difficult than it is already for 'niche' providers like Streetwise to continue undertaking legal aid work, due to the longer time they spend with their vulnerable clients. Part of the problem appears to lie in the LSC's output- rather than outcomes-driven approach to services, regardless of what might prove most cost-effective in the longer term.

## **7. Government policy on young people**

Youth Matters, the Government's overarching youth policy, led by the former Department for Education and Skills (DfES), was virtually silent on housing and homelessness issues. Despite the Government's own Social Exclusion Unit identifying that housing and homelessness represent the most common reason that disadvantaged young adults first contact services, *Youth Matters: Next Steps*,<sup>36</sup> does not mention the word 'housing' once. The word 'homelessness' makes one appearance in an annex on the penultimate page of the report. By contrast, the word 'education' appears 25 times, 'training' 13 times, 'achievement' 10 times and 'positive activities' 9 times, reflecting the firm base that youth policy then had within the DfES. The recent re-structuring of departments, resulting in the replacement of the DfES and the establishment of a new Department for Children Schools & Families, may give impetus to the joining-up of some social welfare services for young people. Significantly, a growing understanding of the importance of meeting young people's housing needs is indicated in new guidance for the provision through children's trusts of 'Targeted Youth Support'<sup>37</sup> and new standards for young people's 'Information Advice & Guidance'.<sup>38</sup>

## **8. Government policy on youth homelessness**

The Department for Communities and Local Government has recently published its new *Youth Homelessness Strategy*.<sup>39</sup> The strategy includes a package of measures to prevent and tackle youth homelessness, through:

- a commitment that by 2010, no 16 or 17 year olds should be placed in bed and breakfast accommodation, except in an emergency;
- improving access to homelessness mediation;
- establishing supported lodging schemes, providing accommodation, advice and mediation services for young people who can no longer stay in the family home;
- commissioning a new National Youth Homelessness Scheme, to be jointly led by Centrepont and YMCA England and delivered by a range of voluntary and community sector agencies. This will explore, develop, validate and disseminate good practice, covering a wide range of services and interventions.

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<sup>36</sup> *Youth Matters: Next Steps*, DfES, 2006.

<sup>37</sup> *Targeted Youth Support: A Guide*, Department for Education and Skills, March 2007.

<sup>38</sup> *Quality Standards for Young People's Information, Advice and Guidance*, Department for Children Schools and Families, July 2007.

<sup>39</sup> A press release was issued on 7<sup>th</sup> March 2007:

<http://www.gnn.gov.uk/Content/Detail.asp?ReleaseID=269340&NewsAreaID=2>

It is highly encouraging that the National Youth Homelessness Scheme is to include a module on Early Prevention & Advice. It must be hoped that this work leads on to the implementation of a full strategy aimed at improving young people's access to high quality legal rights-based advice on housing and homelessness.

For **recommendations** on how to improve young people's access to advice, please refer to: *Young people's social welfare needs and the impact of good advice: Issues Paper*, Youth Access, February 2007.

For **further information** regarding Youth Access' work on advice services, please contact: James Kenrick at Youth Access – 0208 772 9900; [james@youthaccess.org.uk](mailto:james@youthaccess.org.uk)