

Young Adult Carers and Housing Need – Policy Overview

Young adult carers and housing need

Young adult carers are young people aged 16-24 who provide unpaid care to someone, usually within their family, on a regular basis. Over the last two decades, research has demonstrated the adverse effects that a caring role can have on many areas of young people's lives. As a result, young people with caring responsibilities are now a focus in legislation and policy. Greater levels of awareness of young adult carers and their needs has led to an increase in services dedicated to supporting this group of young people. However, despite the recent increased focus on young adult carers and the impact that caring has on various aspects of their lives, the links between caring and housing instability amongst young people has, until now, been overlooked in research and policy.

What's the situation for young adult carers?

During the last decade, young adult carers' needs have become increasingly recognised in policy and by service providers. Legislation¹ introduced in 2015 placed the needs of unpaid carers on a more equal footing with the people they care for. Whole-family assessment of need and young people's right to a 'transition assessment' means that local authorities now have a responsibility to ensure that young adult carers have choices and the right to a 'life of their own' outside of caring.

In June 2018, the Department of Health and Social Care launched a new Carers Action Plan², setting out a cross-government programme of work to support carers in England over the next two years. The plan includes a full section on young carers and young adult carers, focussing on how to improve the identification of young (adult) carers, their education outcomes and access to support services. The plan also commits to improve the support for young adult carers to make positive transitions between the ages of 16 and 24, enabling them to establish a life of their own outside of caring. However, within this broad set of commitments, young adult carers' housing needs are not explicitly recognised or discussed.

Youth homelessness in Britain

Measures taken to reduce and prevent youth homelessness since the 1980s and 1990s have resulted in young people no longer being overrepresented amongst the street homeless population, but many are poorly housed and "hidden homelessness" is affecting young people under 25 disproportionately. The 2017 Homelessness Monitor in England estimated that of over 170,000 homeless and insecurely housed people in Great Britain, 38,000 were under 25 and over half of this group appeared to be sofa surfing³. Numbers of hidden homelessness do not appear to have increased much over the last two years but the

¹ The Care Act (2014) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

² https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/713781/carers-action-plan-2018-2020.pdf

³ Fitzpatrick, S. (2017) The Homelessness monitor: England 2017, Crisis

opportunity for young people to form new households is reported to be considerably diminished with more remaining in the parental home⁴.

Welfare reforms targeted at young people increase the risk of them becoming homeless; in particular, the local housing allowance (LHA) for housing benefit purposes is restricted at a single room rent level for young people, while the age that people in receipt of LHA are expected to live in shared accommodation has increased from 25 to 35. Shared housing, which is at highest levels in 20 years⁵, is now the only realistic housing option for many young people in London and many other parts of the country, especially those on low incomes and dependent on housing benefit. Research undertaken by Crisis has identified that there is very often a large shortfall between the shared accommodation rate (SAR) level (which Move On Up participants are paying) and market rents being charged for rooms in shared houses, especially in London⁶. Meanwhile, the demise of the 'Supporting People' programme which provided grants via local authorities means that there is less availability of housing related support for transition to adulthood and/or other specific needs.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which came into force in April 2018 has placed duties on local authorities to intervene at earlier stages to prevent homelessness in their areas. There are early signs that the Act has enabled a more person-centred approach to managing homelessness in many local authority areas with local authorities reporting positive impacts, especially for single people. Available help is limited by the context of shortages in affordable housing options and the long-term decline in social lets⁷.

At risk of homelessness

While there is no data on the number of young adult carers experiencing homelessness, research suggests that this group of young people are highly likely to experience factors which increase the risk of homelessness.

The youth homelessness charity, Centrepoin, reports that one in ten of young people using its services identify a major cause of their homelessness as breakdown of a relationship in the family home⁸. Young adult carers are more likely than their peers to experience high tension and breakdowns in family relationships, due to practical and emotional pressures and their subsequent restrictions on young people's ability to make transitions into adulthood⁹. Young adult carers also tend to come from lower income households and feel socially isolated¹⁰. It is likely that they will not have the resources or the social relationships with peers needed to make a positive move out of the family home. As a result, they are at

⁴ Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2019) The Homelessness monitor: England 2019, Crisis

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2012) *No room available: study of the availability of shared accommodation*. London: Crisis.

⁷ Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2019) The Homelessness monitor: England 2019, Crisis

⁸ Centrepoin website. Information about the causes and effects of youth homelessness retrieved 06/07/19 <https://centrepoin.org.uk/youth-homelessness/>

⁹ TNS-BMRB and Aldridge, J. (2016) *The lives of young carers in England*. London: DfE.

¹⁰ Becker and Becker (2008) *Young Adult Carers in the UK: Experiences, Needs and Services for Carers aged 16-24*. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers; and APS Group Scotland (2017) *Young carers: Review of social research and data*. Scottish Government

heightened risk of becoming homeless or in insecure living arrangements, such as sleeping on friends' floors and/or in abusive or intolerable situations.

This risk is exacerbated by the UK's housing crisis. The need for more housing that is accessible and affordable for people with low incomes is endorsed by most experts, commentators and political parties. However, the 2018 Social Housing Green Paper fell short of the ambitious public investment in a building programme that some had hoped for. In addition, there does not appear to have been any robust monitoring of the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act on young people. The wider context is a significant rise in numbers of homeless since 2010¹¹.

Local authorities have a duty to undertake a carers assessment/transition assessment with young adult carers, around the age of 18. As part of this process local authorities should consider young adult carers' housing needs and, across their local area, ensure join-up with administering new duties under the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Not on the housing agenda?

The nature of young adult carers' lives, combined with the UK's housing crisis, means that many young adult carers are living in situations which have a serious impact on their physical, emotional and mental health and wellbeing, or are homeless as a result of unsustainable caring arrangements and breakdowns in family relationships. However, young adult carers do not appear to be recognised as a group requiring specific housing-related support. In the current climate of extreme housing need, demand for shared housing and nervousness about developing specialist housing schemes unsupported by revenue commitments, Move On Up stands out as an innovative project, focused on a group whose needs have typically been overlooked for a considerable period of time.

¹¹ Fitzpatrick, S. et al (2019) The Homelessness monitor: England 2019, Crisis

Move On Up

A response from Quaker Social Action and Commonweal Housing

In 2017, Quaker Social Action (QSA), supported by Commonweal Housing, began the delivery of Move On Up, a dedicated housing project for young adult carers, located in London. Move On Up is testing whether a shared housing pathway, alongside empathetic and specialist support, is effective in securing a range of positive outcomes for carers aged 18-25 years and its potential for replication elsewhere. It represents an important opportunity to address the disadvantage that young adult carers typically face by testing out an entirely new delivery model, supported by a rigorous evaluation designed to explore potential for replication and scale within the current national policy and practice context.

The Move On Up project fits well with the principles of recent legislation and the aspirations of national and local government policy for young adult carers, and addresses a clear need in the context of the current housing crisis and the gap in government's considerations of young adult carers' housing needs. It tests a pathway to independent living, alongside tailored support to make positive transitions and to deal with challenges that individual young adult carers living in shared accommodation may experience.

Learning and Work Institute (L&W) is evaluating the Move On Up project for the first three years of its development. Alongside this, L&W is helping to ensure that the project stays informed of policy developments in the social care and housing sectors.

To find out more about Move On Up please visit www.quakersocialaction.org.uk/we-can-help/your-house-and-home/move or e-mail moveonup@qsa.org.uk

About Learning and Work Institute

This policy overview has been produced by Learning and Work Institute as part of its evaluation of Move On Up. Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

Stay informed. Be involved. Keep engaged. Sign up to become a Learning and Work Institute supporter: www.learningandwork.org.uk/supporters. For further information please contact Nicola.Aylward@learningandwork.org.uk