

East Sussex Youth Homelessness Newsletter

Spring/Summer 2010



Tracy Keane and Matt Dunkley at the launch of the young runaways mentoring project

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Update on the new youth homelessness protocol

Change to assisting 16/17 year olds in housing need

The new joint protocol to assist 16/17 year olds in housing need came into place on 1st January 2010. Fitting in line with a recent judgment from the House of Lords, all 16 and 17 year olds who are at risk of homelessness now receive support from Children's Services.

At Children's Services (St Marks House, Eastbourne for those in the West of the county and Ocean House, St Leonards for those in the East) the young person receives an Initial Assessment from a qualified Social Worker. Where the young person is deemed to be at risk of homelessness they are linked into a Housing Support Worker based at Children's Services who acts as their lead professional creating a personalised package of support around the young person.

Reducing the use of B&B

At the heart of the new protocol is helping young people return home where it is safe to do so. Research has shown that the best place for a young person is in the family home. To help young people return home the young person is linked in with mediation services to help resolve the issues that lead to the young person leaving home. To ensure that the relationships don't break down once the mediation ends, the young person and their family are then linked in with longer-term support services that match their needs.

However, there are times where it is not possible for the young person to return home and immediate action has to be taken to make sure the young person is safe. This can require placing the young person in Temporary Accommodation. To avoid placing young people into B&B, Supported Lodgings are increasingly being used as an alternative. Supported Lodgings are a room in a house with a family, couple or single person who have been approved by East Sussex County Council and who will work with a team of professionals to support the young person and help them become independent.

Through increased use of Supported Lodgings, since the new protocol has been in place we have worked towards reducing the number of young people having to go into B&B in an emergency.

To help further reduce the use of B&B and give vulnerable homeless young people an appropriate place to live the supported lodgings team have been working hard to increase the number of places available in the county (look out for their adverts in the FridayAd). If you are interested in becoming a supported lodgings provider or know someone who is please contact the Supported Lodgings team on **01424 726155** or visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk/community/housing/youngpeople

Launch of the young runaways mentoring project

A new mentoring service, managed by young people's charity Catch22, aims to reduce the number young 'runaways' across East Sussex. The Young Runaways Mentoring Project uses volunteers to work with young people, their families and other professionals to address why they run away and build supportive strategies to reduce the number of incidents

Young runaways in East Sussex are often very vulnerable and some are being harmed, threatened or even sleeping rough while they are missing. Then when a young person returns home they are interviewed by the police about where they went, who they were with and what they did while they were missing. Young people, for a variety of reasons, are often reluctant to talk to police and so there are gaps in our knowledge about risks the young person may be at.



The Catch 22 Young Runaways Mentoring Service is bridging that gap by using volunteers to make contact with young runaways while they are missing and once they are returned home. Offering non-judgemental support and guidance, the volunteers are often able to build a rapport with the young person and find out what is really happening in their lives to cause them to runaway. So far, most of the young people seen as part of this service have talked to volunteers about the, often serious, issues they are facing and the service has been able to arrange for the necessary support to be put into place.

This ranges from ongoing forms of support like mentoring, family support services and education support, through to working with social services and the police to protect the young person from significant harm. The excellent work being done by volunteers is an invaluable way of reducing the risks to young people and improving their general wellbeing whilst promoting community engagement & cohesion.

Tracy Keane, service manager of Catch22 East Sussex Appropriate Adult and Mentoring Service, says:

"Volunteers are the key to the success of this project. They are working with young people, their families and carers offering support on things like personal safety, avoiding exploitation, dealing with peer pressure and managing difficult situations. Helping young people with basic skills like cooking, cleaning will also be part of their role; as well as helping them to get back in to education, training or employment, and building their self esteem."

A coordinator supports and supervises volunteers, working on a rota-basis between 8am and 2am, they assist the police with return home interviews and are available to offer ongoing support to young people for as long as they need it. If you would like to volunteer or to fundraise for this service or would like to find out more, contact the service manager on 01323 466635 or by email at tracy.keane@eastsussex.gov.uk or by visiting www.catch-22.org.uk



Rother schools project

In March the Rother schools project was taken to Bexhill High (years 10 and 11) and Rye Community College (year 10). These schools were targeted due to the comparatively high numbers of youth homelessness and teenage pregnancy in both the Bexhill and Rye areas.

The Schools Project is an interactive, lively, performance based programme. It is primarily concerned with the impact of homelessness, but also looks at issues often seen as the 'triggers' of homelessness for young people. These can include mental health problems, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, risky behaviour and young people's capacity to make healthy choices for themselves.

The programme is delivered by a theatre group of dynamic young performers to young people in years 10 and 11. It looks at the links between young people's capacity to successfully manage the demands of school with the pressures of growing up and challenges they may be experiencing at home. The emphasis is on the interaction and participation of the young people with the performers and focuses firmly on young people talking to others as early as possible and the creation of support networks around themselves both in and out of school.



The Schools Project provides one day of interactive theatre performances and workshops. Following a short start to the play the young people are split into four groups, each taking control of one of the four actors and directing their words and actions.

The Schools Project is funded by Rother District Council, East Sussex County Council, and Hastings & Rother Primary Care Trust, and has been provided to schools free of charge. The programme has been recognised as good practice in terms of working in partnership to prevent youth homelessness, details can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/youthhomelessness/prevention/schools/strategyapproach/seanstorycasestudy10/>

Connexions 360 website – housing information now live

The East Sussex Connexions 360 service offers information, advice, guidance and support to young people aged 13-19 through a network of Connexions personal advisers (PAs). As part of this service the Connexions 360 website was launched in November 2009 and includes information and advice on all aspects of life for children and young people in East Sussex. Subjects include health, travel, things to do, work, education, bullying and drugs.

In March 2010 the housing advice pages went live on the Connexions 360 website. Split into two pages – advice for 17s and under and advice for 18 and over - young people can now find out quickly and easily exactly who can help them, where they can go for help and the sort of help they can expect to get.

The housing information pages can be found at:

<http://connexions360.org.uk/healthandadvice/housing/Pages/main.aspx>

Youth Homelessness Team Update

A warm welcome to two new members of the Youth Homelessness Team:

Amelia Merricks is the new Housing Support Worker for the Hastings and Rother areas. Based at Ocean House, Amelia's role involves acting as the lead professional for 16/17 year olds in housing need helping to make best use of the existing resources by linking the young person into the most appropriate services. Amelia can be contacted on **01424 724130**.

In June **John Barson** starts in post as the new Homelessness Social Worker for the Eastbourne, Lewes and Wealden areas. Based at St Marks House, in this newly created post John will be assessing homeless 16/17 year olds and will work closely with families, housing colleagues and the Housing Support Worker (Helen Johnson) to help ensure that homeless young people get the support they need. John can be contacted on **01323 747094**.

For further information please contact Andy McKechnie, Young Persons Housing Coordinator on 01424 726059 or andy.mckechnie@eastsussex.gov.uk