A Guide for Homeless 16 & 17 year olds

Helping homeless young people to know about the support they can expect

Anyone can become homeless due to circumstances that may have been out of their control. Being homeless means having no fixed place to stay or place to feel safe and secure; this can also affect a person’s self-esteem, confidence and identity. Many homeless people can feel alone and desperate. It is not always easy to be motivated and enthusiastic when sleeping rough or living in temporary accommodation. It takes a lot to keep going, to feel positive and to try and turn the situation around and to get back on your feet and feeling good. It is important to try and get as much support as you can, from wherever you can, in order to help you to access services and assistance which is out there.

This leaflet explains Where to go if you are faced with homelessness and what might happen next.
What should I do if I might become homeless, or I am homeless?

If you are faced with homelessness, you can contact your local council offices (housing), contact Herts Young Homeless (hyh) or call Children’s Services. The contact details for all three are at the end of this leaflet. If you are able to stay where you are for a little while, then this may provide time for workers to look at how you can be supported in the longer term. It might be that some sort of mediation is needed; for instance if you have fallen out with family members. hyh is a voluntary organisation that works with young people and their families to help solve problems so that the young person can stay at home, or return home if possible.

If you have nowhere to stay, then hyh may be able to find you a bed in their Crashpad scheme (either in a hostel or a crashpad host family). If this is not available, other temporary accommodation will be identified whilst your needs are being assessed. This is usually in the local area, but sometimes not (depending on what might be available).

All agencies that you work with during this time will support you in finding a solution to your housing issue, however, they are also committed to preventing homelessness where possible and so will look at all of the prevention options available as part of the process. This may include speaking to family members / relatives and all relevant parties along with looking at possible support services that could be put in place to assist with a return home, either permanently or whilst a planned, longer term accommodation option can be secured.

What are my responsibilities if I am placed in temporary accommodation?

Temporary accommodation will generally be furnished, but you will need to provide some things such as bedding, cooking utensils. If you do not have these, then you will be provided with information about agencies that may be able to help you.

All temporary accommodation requires that you pay a licence fee. This is similar to rent payments. If you cannot afford this, then housing benefit payments should be able to help you. However, you will be expected to pay the ‘service charges’
(electric, gas, water) out of your own money. A Temporary Accommodation Officer and/or hyh support worker will be able to advise you about finances such as housing benefit and the charges you will need to pay.

**It is really important that you speak to someone without delay** if you are in temporary accommodation and getting into financial difficulties. Not paying rent or service charges could lead to you being evicted and considered as being intentionally homeless (this means it would be thought to be your fault that you didn’t keep up with rent payments) and the housing department will then not have a duty to find you somewhere else to stay.

Temporary accommodation is available only for a short while so workers will be looking at what the longer term plan is for you. This will include a referral to Targeted Youth Support Service (TYSS) who are part of Hertfordshire’s Children’s Services. TYSS have social workers who are experienced in supporting and working with young people and their families when they are experiencing problems and stress. TYSS help young people and their parents/carers to better understand why things may have become difficult in the first place and also provide services to improve relationships and home-life.

**What will happen when I am referred to Targeted Youth Support Service?**

A meeting will be arranged for you to meet with the TYSS social worker, a housing worker and, where possible someone from hyh. The purpose of the meeting is to understand how your situation came about and to explore the best way to help you. This is called a Joint Housing Support Meeting.

It is important for you to know that Children’s Services, Housing and hyh have a duty to help young people to be able to live at home with their families, if they consider it is a safe place for you to be. The workers may need to speak with your parent(s) or carer(s) for their views on the difficulties that have come about, and see what can be done to support you to live at home if at all possible. A worker will also speak to other professionals who know you, such as your doctor, school/college, or anyone else helping you.
Once the workers have completed an assessment of your needs, a recommendation will be made as to whether you should become a ‘child looked after’ or not i.e. being ‘in care’. You will be informed of this recommendation as soon as possible following the assessment and you will be able to give your views about the assessment and recommendation.

**Do I have a choice about being looked after?**

Yes you do. An offer for you to be looked after ‘in care’ will only be made if there is no other suitable way of meeting all your needs. It is very important that you understand what being looked after ‘in care’ means, so that you can make an informed choice. You can speak to an independent person when considering your decision (see contacts at the end of this guidance).

**What will happen if I say no?**

You will not be forced to be looked after ‘in care’, your consent is needed. If you say no to an offer of becoming looked after ‘in care’, your housing application will be considered but there are no guarantees that your application will be successful.

**What happens if I do become looked after?**

Children’s Services will look for a ‘placement’. The type of placement you will live in depends on your age and your needs. Your views and wishes will be taken into account when looking for a placement, but the most suitable placement for you is not always available in your choice of location. The placement could be:

- with a foster carer;
- with a supported lodgings carer;
- in a residential home or a hostel;
- in a semi-independent placement in a rented property.
What will happen if later on I decide I don’t want to be looked after?

Being looked after only happens with your agreement. At any time you can change your mind - but you would need to take some advice before deciding you no longer wish to be looked after. Further information about advocate and advice services is provided at the end of this guidance.

When would I stop being ‘looked after’?

If you have been looked after for a while, you may be entitled to ‘Leaving Care’ support from TYSS who provide services to care leavers. They start supporting you when you are approaching the age of 18. This could continue until you are 21 years old and beyond in certain situations.

If I need independent advice, where can I go?

Citizens Advice Bureau
Advice Line: 03444 111444

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, independent, impartial and confidential advice

NYAS is a UK charity providing information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to children, young people and vulnerable adults. NYAS also provides specialist legal advice and assistance. They are independent and confidential (as long as you are safe). They can listen to you and give advice about your homeless situation and help you consider the services you are being offered. For information or advice, please contact the NYAS helpline on FREEPHONE 0808 808 1001 or send an email to help@nyas.net

Shelter
Shelter is a National Charity that can offer information and advice about homelessness.
Helpline 0808 800 4444 or visit www.shelter.org.uk
hyh services are open to all 16 – 24 year olds who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. They provide information and support as well as emergency accommodation through the Crashpad scheme, where appropriate for 16/17yr olds. hyh have trained and experienced mediators to work with young people to help both them and their families find solutions to relationship problems. Mediation can improve communication, is impartial and confidential. Mediators listen to the young person and their respective families without taking sides or making judgements. hyh also have a range of other services that may be able to offer support to you and your family. Office hours are 9am – 5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am to 4.30pm on Fridays.

There are ten housing Authorities across Hertfordshire. Your local Housing Authority provides information and advice about housing to everyone, including people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Contact your local Housing Authority at:

**Address**

**Telephone**

Targeted Youth Support Service, Children’s Services, Hertfordshire County Council. Tel: 0300 123 4043 (24hrs)

The Targeted Youth Support Service (TYSS) is part of Hertfordshire’s Children’s Services and part of their work is to help young people and their families where there is a risk of family breakdown. For some young people, it may be that being Looked After is necessary to safeguard their welfare. A TYSS social worker will support a young person in these circumstances.