



Submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on developing a Youth Homelessness Strategy March 15, 2022

1. Introduction

Le Chéile Mentoring welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in relation to the next Government Youth Homeless Strategy.

Who we are

Our Mission: Le Chéile Mentoring is a national, volunteer mentoring and family support service, which works with young people and their families, where the young person is involved in or at risk of offending.

Our Vision: For every young person at risk - the right supports at the right time, to make the most of their lives.

2. How do you think the housing needs of young people (age 18-24) differ from those of other age groups?

Ireland is in the midst of a housing crisis that is disproportionately impacting young people. Securing affordable, quality and appropriate accommodation is more difficult than ever, but it is young people who are getting overlooked and are most at risk of becoming homeless.

Young people in the 18 to 24 age-bracket often have no choice but to rely on family support in finding and securing appropriate accommodation. This can be financial support in meeting rent payments or providing a deposit, legal support in acting as guarantors or co-signing a lease, or physical support in continuing to provide space and accommodation in the family home until the young person is in a better position to move.

Le Chéile Mentoring works with young people in this age range who are at risk of offending. When staff were consulted on the housing needs of the young people we work with, it was highlighted that care leavers, young people with complex mental health or substance use needs, and young people who are facing family breakdown or exclusion from the family home may not have access to this support network and are at a higher risk of becoming homeless.

3. What do you believe are the main barriers to young people accessing housing?

The cost of rent is increasing across the country and the availability of social housing is insufficient in meeting demand. This puts the onus on landlords and local authorities to pick and choose the type of tenant they want and, very often, this is not a young person with no references, potentially insecure income, and complex needs. They are often excluded either directly by choosing a more 'suitable' tenant or indirectly by the need to provide references, a deposit and other administrative requirements.

Where young people can access housing, there may be undue expectations or strict clauses built into the contract that often do not take into account emotional immaturity or the young person's inexperience in living independently. There needs to be greater understanding and support for young people, particularly those who are trying to live independently out of necessity, as opposed to choice.

Where there is a lack of suitable housing available, young people may then be more vulnerable to exploitation or ending up in dangerous situations. Le Chéile's experience is that many young people feel emergency accommodation was unsafe and unsuitable due to a lack of personal space, being housed with people of different ages and exposure to drug use and other complex issues. As a result, many chose to 'couch surf', seek out unregulated or unsafe rental accommodation, or stay on the streets.

It is not just the cost of accommodation that is increasing, but also household bills for gas and electricity, as well as the cost of food. The increase in the cost of living will also have a detrimental impact on young people who may be forced to choose between food and heating or paying their rent on time. This will further prohibit their ability to secure or maintain appropriate and affordable housing where they can feel comfortable, safe and able to plan for their futures.

4. What do you think are the main risk factors that can result in a young person becoming homeless? /What do you consider to be the main risk factors that a young person faces when they are homeless?

When staff in Le Chéile were consulted about the young people they work with who have been homeless in the past, they noted that serious mental health issues, substance use and family conflict are often risk factors that can result in a young person becoming homeless. They are also risk factors that can be exacerbated by homelessness and can become barriers to finding more secure and longer-term accommodation.

Family conflict or a breakdown in the family dynamic was noted as a significant risk factor to young people becoming homeless. Young people who age out of the care system were also noted as being more at risk. It is these young people who may lack crucial support in transitioning to independent living.

It was felt that many families themselves were also suffering under the current housing system and living in cramped and inappropriate accommodation. This can lead young people to have a lack of faith in the system and to not feel valued, so they may have low or no expectations of finding quality and affordable accommodation.

5. What services and/or initiatives do you think should be introduced to prevent homelessness and/or support young people exiting homelessness?

Mentoring could offer valuable support for young people experiencing homelessness. In particular, this could include young people who are about to leave residential care. Being offered the support of a mentor could bridge the gap between full professional support and fully independent living.

In Le Chéile Mentoring, we match volunteer mentors with young people aged between 12 and 24. A mentor offers a listening ear, life advice and can signpost the young person to additional supports if needed. It offers time out each week to take part in different activities and to work towards specific

goals. Young people in the 18 to 24 age range and, particularly, young people who age out of the care system, are often unprepared for independent living and everything that this entails, so the support of a mentor could be very beneficial. In 2017, Le Chéile's mentoring programme was evaluated and it was noted that the voluntary aspect of mentoring was viewed positively by young people, as it differentiates mentoring from other services they may be linked in with.

Le Cheile also recommends a greater focus on trauma informed care to be built in to youth homelessness services. It is important to have a greater understanding of the trauma young people who end up homeless may have faced during the course of their lives. Empathy, understanding and appreciation that young people may make mistakes as they try to find secure housing would also create greater trust in the system.

6. What top five priorities should the Youth Homelessness Strategy focus on?

1. Increased availability of quality, affordable housing that is accessible to all, secure and of a high standard. This includes emergency accommodation, social housing, rental accommodation and HAP approved accommodation.
2. Greater understanding of young people, their backgrounds and their particular needs built into the system. This should include trauma informed care training as standard for all agencies working with homeless young people.
3. Reduction in the level of paperwork that is required to secure accommodation. There are often unnecessary barriers that, if removed, would provide more equality of access to potential accommodation.
4. A holistic approach that focuses on providing early support for families experiencing conflict and breakdown in the home. This would mean that less young people may become homeless in the first place.
5. Provision of targeted accommodation and homeless support for young people in particular. This may include additional supports, such as mentoring that can help prepare a young person for self-sufficient, independent living.

ENDS

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