

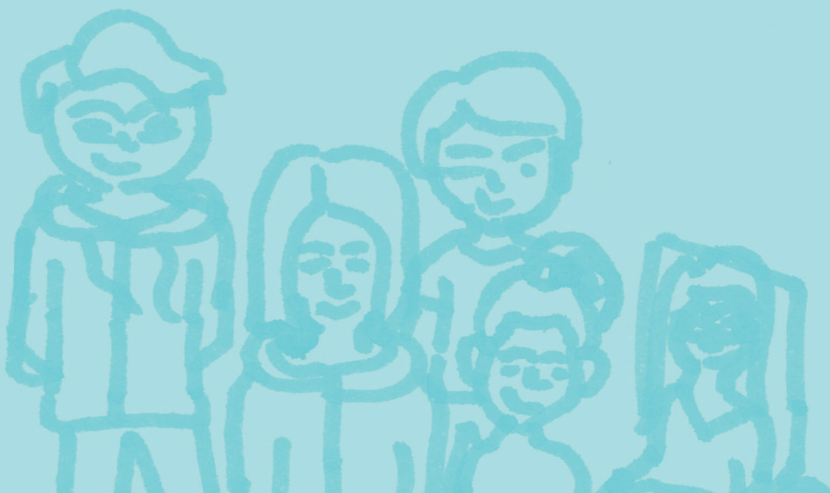


Children's
Rights Alliance
for England

#homes4children
Change it!

**'It's like being
in prison'**

**Children speak out
on homelessness**



Foreword by Virginia Brás Gomes, Chair, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The right to adequate housing is a fundamental human right, as well as intrinsically important for the realisation of many other rights. This briefing powerfully makes the case for ending the use of unsuitable Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless children in England, many of whom are forced to live there for much longer than the legal limit. The testimonies of these children and young people clearly illustrate how damaging living in this type of accommodation is on a child's physical and mental health and how the lived injustices shape their childhood and adolescence.

In 2016, following the consideration of the report of the UK on its implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), my Committee raised concerns about the lack of social housing and the significant rise in homelessness affecting families with children. Article 11 of ICESCR gives everyone, including children and young people, the right to adequate housing. This right is also echoed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. My Committee has made it clear that the right to housing must not be interpreted in a narrow sense, as shelter provided by merely having a roof over one's head, but that it means 'the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity' with adequate space, protection from the cold and damp as well as from other threats to health and safety. Adequate housing is also fundamental to children's ability to enjoy their other rights, including education, health, protection, play and nutrition. Above all, it is indispensable for their physical security and emotional wellbeing. The stories the children tell in this briefing vividly show that there is still much work to be done before all children in England have their right to adequate housing realised. It is what each and every one of them deserve and public authorities have an obligation to enable them to realise this right.

I commend the children and young people for their bravery in speaking out on an issue which is often wrongly shrouded in stigma and shame, as well as the Change it! steering group for taking action to realise their rights and those of other children. I urge the government to listen to what these children say because a childhood without a proper home is no childhood at all.

Introduction by the Change it! Steering Group

We are a steering group of young activists supported by the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), to speak out on children's rights issues we witness and face everyday. There are 24 of us from across England, aged ten to 21 years-old. Many of us have direct experience of our rights not being met, and have experienced homelessness. We are passionate about improving the lives of all children and young people.

Our Change it! campaign seeks to stop children being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation (B&Bs) for longer than the six-week legal limit. The campaign grew out of the 'See it, Say it, Change it!' project which began in 2015 when, with support from CRAE, we researched and wrote a report from children in England about how well their rights were being met. We submitted the report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (the UN Committee) as part of its examination of how well the UK was respecting children's rights. We then travelled to the United Nations in Geneva as part of the UK's child delegation and presented the evidence from our report to the UN Committee. Recommendations made by the UN Committee to the Government highlighted the problem of children being housed in Temporary Accommodation (TA), like B&Bs, for extended periods, an issue we had highlighted in our research.

Because members of our group have grown up in B&Bs, we know how bad it can be. We don't think that children should be housed in B&Bs or TA at all, but especially not for longer than the legal limit. Doing so violates children's rights and damages their development. Shockingly there are over 120,000 homeless children in families in England. B&Bs used to house children are often unhygienic, unsafe and inappropriate for their needs, with dirty, shared bathrooms, cramped rooms and no space for children to play or study. Children are regularly housed alongside adults, who sometimes have alcohol and drug problems, in areas with high levels of crime which are far away from school, friends and other family.

This briefing presents findings from interviews with children in B&Bs and TA. It gives a platform for their voices and shows how their lives are being damaged by living in these places. Child homelessness is a huge problem, and we urgently need the Government to take action to #Changelt

Anmol	aged 21	Liam	aged 21
Cameron	aged 11	Mark	aged 20
Emily	aged 13	Renee	aged 19
Emma	aged 15	Rozita	aged 20
Fowzia	aged 19	Reko	aged 19
Hamza	aged 18	Siham	aged 10
Jade	aged 14	Shailan	aged 13
Jamie-Lea	aged 17	Shikira	aged 15
Kaytie	aged 10	Sivitha	aged 16
Kiki	aged 16	Tufa	aged 11
Laila	aged 12	Will	aged 10
Leah	aged 13	Zakya	aged 17

National Overview

Growing number of homeless children in England

Bed and Breakfasts (B&Bs) and Temporary Accommodation (TA) are often unsafe, dirty, overcrowded and breach health and safety regulations. Very young children have nowhere to play, crawl and learn to walk, and parents find it difficult to set up regular sleep routines or potty train. Older children have no privacy and have nowhere to study or socialise with friends. Unsurprisingly, growing up in this kind of accommodation has been shown to have a detrimental impact on children's mental and physical health and development.¹

Yet the past decade has seen a huge growth in numbers of children experiencing homelessness and being forced to live in TA, including B&Bs, often for long periods of time. Figures show that 79,000 families are currently housed in TA in England, a staggering rise of 65% since 2010² and an increase of 8% on the previous year.³ At the end of 2017 60,520 homeless households with children were housed in TA, totalling 120,510 individual homeless children, 72% (87,320) of which are in London.⁴

The 2003 Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order specified that families with children could only be placed in B&B accommodation for a period of up to six weeks. But children, in and out of families, continue to be housed in B&Bs for extended periods. In the last year numbers of homeless households placed in B&Bs rose by 10%, and are now 250% higher than in 2009.⁵ At the end of 2017 2,050 households with children or headed by a child were housed in a B&B and of these nearly 45% (900) stayed longer than six weeks.⁶ Families housed in B&B "annexes", which fall within the scope of the regulations, are not counted in these figures, despite annexes sharing similar features to standard B&Bs.⁷

Under the Children Act 1989 local authorities have a duty to house 16 and 17 year olds 'in need' in 'suitable settings', which include regulated settings such as foster care.⁸ Statutory guidance states that in some instances they can be placed in 'other arrangements' which are not regulated, such as supported lodgings, supported housing and independent accommodation.⁹ However, the guidance is clear that hotel and B&B accommodation is not suitable for 16 and 17 year olds in care, even in an emergency.¹⁰ It's recognised that this accommodation puts them at risk of sexual exploitation, involvement in criminal activity, mental and physical abuse and pressure to take drugs or alcohol.¹¹ Nonetheless with growing pressure on local councils combined with a deficit of suitable emergency accommodation, the practice continues- often placing children at great risk and resulting in huge damage to their lives. As figures are not currently collected on how often this happens it is impossible to have an accurate picture, however data recently obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to local authorities found that of 60 local authorities which responded, nearly 40% confirmed rare or occasional use of B&Bs to house 16 and 17 year-olds, while 30% reported increased use of this type of accommodation for young people aged 16-24 years old in the last year.¹²

Lack of safeguarding

In many cases local authorities are not fulfilling their safeguarding duties, and inspections of properties are being carried out infrequently.

Our 2017 FOI requests to local authorities found that almost a quarter of TA housing families (including that which is privately leased) are only inspected once tenants leave, not while the family is living there.¹³ Another 17% only inspect annually and 16% inspect every two to six months. Almost a third said they do not have a safeguarding policy that applies when transferring children from local authority accommodation to private rental TA, and over half (56%) said they did not have one for transferring children to TA or B&Bs. Worryingly, nearly two thirds (64%) said that they did not seek advice from their safeguarding service when they placed families in B&Bs and/or TA.

Many families housed in B&B and TA are placed outside of their local area, sometimes by great distances. This often results in loss of essential support networks, employment and education. In 2017 22,150 households were placed in TA out of area, a staggering increase of nearly 300% since 2010 (5,630).¹⁴ Despite law and guidance requiring councils to place families (where practical) in the borough in which they are resident,¹⁵ local authorities are still moving households out of area due to reductions in benefits and increasing rents.¹⁶ In Birmingham this year 1,192 households were moved out of area, all but 77 of which were placed into B&B.¹⁷ This is against the best interests of many children.¹⁸ A landmark 2015 court judgement emphasised that, while out of area placements are not in themselves unlawful, councils have a legal duty to ensure that relocation is suitable and appropriate for the family's circumstances, taking into account any potential disruption to education, medical needs, caring responsibilities and employment.¹⁹ The then Communities and Local Government Select Committee has recommended: *'housing people away from their homes and support networks should be an action of last resort.'*²⁰

Detrimental impact of welfare reform

Welfare reform has been recognised as a driver of the growing numbers of homeless families,²¹ alongside a decline in social housing and spiralling unregulated private rents.²² Despite more families being forced into private rented accommodation, private rents and housing benefit are now misaligned, removing an essential safety net and leading to increasing numbers of families being evicted from their homes.²³

Homeless families with children would ordinarily be classified as in "priority need". Yet, housing advice services see many families who are denied a full homelessness duty by their local authority because they are deemed to be "intentionally homeless", for example because they have fallen into rent arrears and been evicted. With the benefit cap and other cuts making it less likely that housing benefit will cover the full costs of rent, such judgments are extremely harsh. Families found to be intentionally homeless should still be offered help following a "child in need" assessment under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. However, this does not always happen, and even when it does, families are frequently placed into unsuitable B&Bs often with shared facilities which can be dirty, unsafe and put children at risk from dangerous adults.²⁴ 2016 FOI requests submitted by CRAE found that 352 families were found to be "intentionally homeless" on the 31 March 2016 and a quarter of these families were housed in accommodation with shared facilities. However, the numbers are likely to be far higher as only a third of local authorities were able to

Over half of local authorities asked said they **did not have a safeguarding policy for transferring children to local authority temporary accommodation or B&Bs.**



provide the information. Worryingly many were unable to respond because the numbers were too high to report back on or they did not collect the information in an accessible format.

Adequate housing is a child's human right

Adequate housing is a human right recognised under international law including in Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It has been enshrined in major international human rights treaties including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Article 27 of CRC states that every child must have a standard of living, which is adequate to allow them to develop fully physically, mentally, spiritually, morally and socially. Whilst recognising the responsibilities that parents have, the CRC is clear that governments must ensure that they provide assistance to families to ensure that children's essential needs are met - in particular, nutrition, clothing and housing. Other relevant articles include: Article 2 which entitles all children the rights in the CRC without discrimination - this includes discrimination on the basis of their (or their parents') status or property; Article 3 that states that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child should be a primary consideration; Article 4 which says that public bodies should use the maximum available resources to ensure that all children have their economic, social and cultural rights realised; and Article 26, which gives children the right to receive assistance through social benefits, depending on the circumstances of their families.

Following its examination of the UK in 2016, the UN Committee raised concern about the increase in the number of homeless households with children, the number of homeless families staying in temporary accommodation and the impact of welfare reforms on children. In the same year, similar concerns were raised by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which noted "with concern" the impact reforms of social security have had on the right to adequate housing.²⁵

The UN Committee recommended the Government: revise social security reforms in order to ensure that the best interest of the child were a primary consideration; strictly implement the legal prohibition of prolonged placement of children in temporary accommodation; take necessary measures to reduce homelessness and to progressively guarantee all children stable access to adequate housing that provides physical safety, adequate space, protection against the threats to health and structural hazards, including cold, damp, heat and pollution, and accessibility for disabled children.²⁶

The Government needs to take forward the UN Committee's recommendations with urgency to ensure a child's right to adequate housing is made a reality for all children in England.



Children speak out on their experiences of homelessness

The children we have spoken to have told us about the devastating impact being homeless has had on their lives. They describe living in overcrowded, cold, damp, filthy and unsafe conditions, in rooms far too small for families.

They explained that in B&Bs they lived in, cooking facilities and bathrooms are usually shared, sometimes with adults who have mental health issues or drug and alcohol problems. They informed us of a lack of support from social workers, having no place to study, being forced to share beds with parents or siblings, and never feeling safe or secure.

They also told us about and being moved many miles from school, friends and family, resulting in long daily commutes and an absence of support for them and their parents. In some cases moving resulted in loss of benefits payments and important legal documents, due to missing post. Children highlighted the negative impact living in a B&B was having on their parent's mental health, adding additional stress to their lives.

A young person we spoke to who was housed illegally in a B&B when she was 16 told us about being at risk of sexual exploitation, witnessing domestic violence, developing drug and alcohol problems and dropping out of education as a result of her housing situation. Another child speaks out on his experience in TA, to which the six week limit currently does not apply, despite presenting similar risks and rights violations to children housed there.

Change it!



Help us make children's lives so much better, by giving them a safe home! :)

Children of all ages are being left in B&Bs and TA for months on end, often with no support and no idea how long they will be there. Many of the children in this research describe losing hope in their futures as a result of where they live.

This briefing presents a small sample of in-depth interviews with children who have either been housed in B&Bs or TA in the past, or who were still living there at the time of the interview. Yet sadly we know the experiences detailed here are similar to those of thousands of other children. Homeless children are more often than not overlooked by those with power. We hope this briefing helps to address this problem by helping some children to have their voices heard.

Children in homeless families living in B&Bs

Ellen

“ I lived in a B&B with my mum for over two months, I was the same age I am now, 12. It was always cold. I don't think there was heating. It's not like when you're at home. There were a lot of strangers around. Some people who lived there were friendly to children because they had kids, but some people weren't. I didn't feel safe. You didn't know who was living there or what they might be capable of.

Everyone in the building shared a kitchen. To use it you had to ask the receptionist for the key. Sometimes when we needed to cook we were told it was too late. When we did get in there, there would be queues of people waiting to cook. The cupboards were all taken. It was messy, plates everywhere, and tissue on the floor. The oven didn't work. There was a washing machine but it was broken. Water would start leaking out if you tried to use it. There was an outside space but it was always full of people smoking. I'd be breathing the smoke if I went there. Other people living there drank alcohol and sometimes they would be very loud.

Our room was cramped with two single beds almost touching. We had a tiny bathroom - there was no gap between the toilet and the shower. Often the water in the shower was cold. The bathroom took up some of our room so there was only a tiny space to walk through, like a hallway. You couldn't fully open the door when you came in. There was no privacy. At night in bed my head was close to the window. There was so much noise; the sirens, the people outside. Once there was a crash in front of the building. There was just too much noise.

For people like us there was toast with butter for breakfast. There was sausage, egg, beans and mushrooms, but you had to pay for those which we couldn't afford. Sometimes I wouldn't eat as the dining room where breakfast was served was busy and I had to rush to get on a bus for school. It was a long journey.

Living in the B&B really affected my school work. There was nowhere to study. The only space was a dining room and there was always people on their phones in there, or watching TV. The internet wasn't working. I think it affected my exams as I had no time to revise in school and there was nowhere to study at the B&B.

There wasn't anyone at my school to support me. It would have helped if there was someone I could talk to. So, if I was having a hard time at school keeping up, or feeling bad, then they would understand because they knew my situation. It would have taken the pressure off if I could have sat in the school office and done my work there.

I told some close friends where I was living. One of my friends is in care. She understands what I'm going through. Before she went into care she lived with her mum in many different temporary places including B&B. She's my age. Some people at school would ask, "Do you want to go to the park later?" They didn't know what I'd been going through.

You weren't allowed to have visitors in the B&B. If you wanted company, someone to cheer you up, that could never happen. I just had to manage as we never knew when we would be leaving. I thought it would be a long time, so I had to manage. We did have a social worker but all she asked was 'Is it ok in there?'. I needed her to be looking for a place closer to school that was appropriate for children.

If I'd known the legal limit was six weeks I would have tried to tell someone. It would help if children were given information about their rights in housing so they could use their voices to speak up, and know that by complaining they weren't doing something wrong or naughty. If I could change something about the experience of living in B&B it would be the staff, and the social workers. I would get people who have been in the same situation when they were young and could understand the kind of place a child needs to live.

If I could give the Government a message I would tell them living in B&B is causing bad things for children, self-harming, committing suicide, because children get really stressed when they have nowhere decent to live. The Government needs to find something to do about it on time! They're meant to take care, of children. Children

need to be housed with people their own age and adults who are part of families. We needed to be with other single mums and kids where we could talk and support each other. There should be a study room, somewhere for the kids to play. It made me feel so stressed because I had to move again and again. After the B&B we came to this temporary house. We've been here seven months but they will move us again next week. ”

Michael & Deanna

Michael

“ *I'm 14 years old and Deanna, my sister, is 11 years-old. We were told that it was temporary accommodation and we would only stay in the B&B for six weeks. It's been four or five months. At first we were counting down, thinking we should hear from the council but I've almost given up hope now.*

Deanna

It's not comfortable, it's not a place that a child wants to grow up. When we first arrived outside we could hear the woman whose room is next door to ours screaming at her children.

Michael

There are four in our family: me, Deanna, my mum and our five-year-old sister. We are in one room with two beds. I have to share a bed with Deanna. Upstairs there are three families; downstairs there are two families.

The kitchen is shared between all the families. My mum doesn't cook anymore because it's not clean and the cooker is set to a limit so it takes a long time to warm up. It's like the owners of the B&B are trying to save money. We mostly eat chicken and chips. I think it's affected my health. I kind of don't care anymore and I know that's bad but you can't cook when the kitchen is dirty.

Deanna

We've all lost weight. Our Mum especially, she's lost a lot of weight. She rarely eats. She has depression.

Michael

She goes to therapy to try to cope. She'll probably eat breakfast and that's it, just a cup of tea.

Deanna

We share a bathroom. There is not enough bathrooms for each family to have their own.

Michael

There are two showers in the building. We're meant to use the one upstairs but it doesn't work properly, it's hot enough to burn you. So we wake up at 5am so we can use the downstairs one, and don't clash with the other people living here. Sometimes in the morning you'll see stuff in the toilet and the sink. It's disgusting.

Deanna

When you want to go to the toilet and wash your hands, it's dirty. It makes me feel disgusted and I don't want to be there.

Michael

There is a washing machine in the building, it's £5 per wash or something. It's too expensive for us to use as we have so little money.

Deanna

In the B&B strangers are always intruding in your personal space. You can rarely relax.

Michael

You can't go downstairs and watch TV because there'll be someone shouting. You're locked up in one room with your family. There's nothing to do. It's like being in prison.

They don't provide breakfast. The owner said it was 'continental' and there is a cupboard which says you can take food from between 8-9am. But there is nothing in it.

Deanna

There is a fridge where other people keep milk.

Michael

But it's not for us, we can't touch it. I think there is favouritism from the owner of the B&B towards some families. For example, we have one cupboard and some people have two or three. I think it's racism. It's the same with our room, I'm 14 and Deanna is 11, and she's a female, but we still have to share the same bedroom and the same bed. But another family who live here have children all the same sex and they have two bedrooms.

Deanna

In the B&B they rarely put on the heaters. When we first came in it was freezing. I think they've only put the heating on once in the whole time we've been here.

Michael

It's so cold at night.

Deanna

We have to wear layers when we're going to sleep. Sometimes I even wear my jacket

Michael

I'll wear a tracksuit, a onesie, and my jacket because it's so cold.

Deanna

The windows and doors don't close properly.

Michael

The door handle came off so the owners stuck a nail in it. It's so dangerous.

Deanna

My finger got stuck in the door with the nail once. It really hurt.

Michael

I find it hard to study and to keep up with school. It's very stressful. The walls are so thin, we hear the lady next door shouting at her kids even at night.

Deanna

When I come back from school all I hear is shouting from the other people who live here. We have exams coming up but I can't study properly.

Michael

I have GCSE's in a few months time. Going to school I'm stressed because I know I'm coming back to a place where I can't focus. I want to join the army as an officer so I need the grades to get into the army college. Sometimes I go to the library but I can't go all the time because this is not a safe area. I think the B&B really does affect your grades. I'll just lie down on the bed, and go on YouTube instead of studying as it distracts me from all of the pressure of living here.

Deanna

It's difficult for me to study. Michael sits on the bed and I sit on the wooden floor. It's not comfortable. I'm doing my SATS this year and have a lot of revising to do. There are some exams I haven't done well in. Our school knows about the housing situation. There is this lady in the student information resource centre. I think she tried to speak to our housing officer but the housing officer wasn't helpful. To cope I normally just read books, it kind of blocks out all the noise.

Michael

Some of our letters went missing. We never received a letter for my Mum's Disclosure and Barring Service check, and she had to reapply for her debit card 4 times. It makes you feel insecure. My mum leaves the house at 6.00am in the morning for work, but we leave for school later. She always tells us "Make sure the door is locked." She doesn't trust the owner.

The school have offered nothing in terms of support, except the lady in student resources. I've spoken to the MP of my borough but they haven't helped. I can't really tell my friends.

Deanna

It could result in bullying.

Michael

Yes, it could. I think it won't affect friendships as long as my friends don't know. Even in church not everyone knows about it. Our closest friends don't know. I feel embarrassed to tell people.

Deanna

The housing officer said we could be here, on the waiting list, for ten years.

Michael

It feels like putting people in B&Bs is a quick and easy way to get rid of families. There's no point going to the council because they're not going to do anything.

Deanna

You have to accept it really.

Michael

The most difficult thing for me about living in a B&B is sharing the facilities. For our family as a whole I think privacy is the hardest thing, there is no such thing as privacy in a B&B. When my mum wants to dress, I have to leave the room. She gets up early so she can dress before us.

Deanna

Sharing the facilities and studying are the hardest things for me. No one has really supported me. I think it's so important that a child can grow up in a safe environment, where they have enough space and they can study. I want to tell the Government that every child should have somewhere to grow up safe because when a child lives in a B&B, then they might not have a good education to get a suitable job. ”

Fowzia

“ I was housed in a B&B for six months with my Mum, my two little brothers, who were aged seven and four, and my little sister who was thirteen. I was 16 years-old. Our landlord increased the rent by £200 a month on our old house and we couldn't afford the increase so we ended up being housed in a B&B. We were there for two weeks and didn't go to school because it was too far to travel. The council called us one morning and told us we were going to move to a different B&B. We had to pack quickly because the receptionist told us we'd be charged if we weren't out by 12pm.

When we arrived at the new B&B, no one at reception believed that we had a room booked. We sat there for four hours on a school day. It was embarrassing. My brother kept crying. He was hungry. Finally they gave us a room. It was cramped, Mum had to share a bed with my brother who has a genetic disease and Scoliosis, and he shouldn't really share a bed with anyone. There was rotten food in the room when we arrived and the bedding wasn't clean. I don't feel like I had much privacy. It was so cramped, our stuff was everywhere.

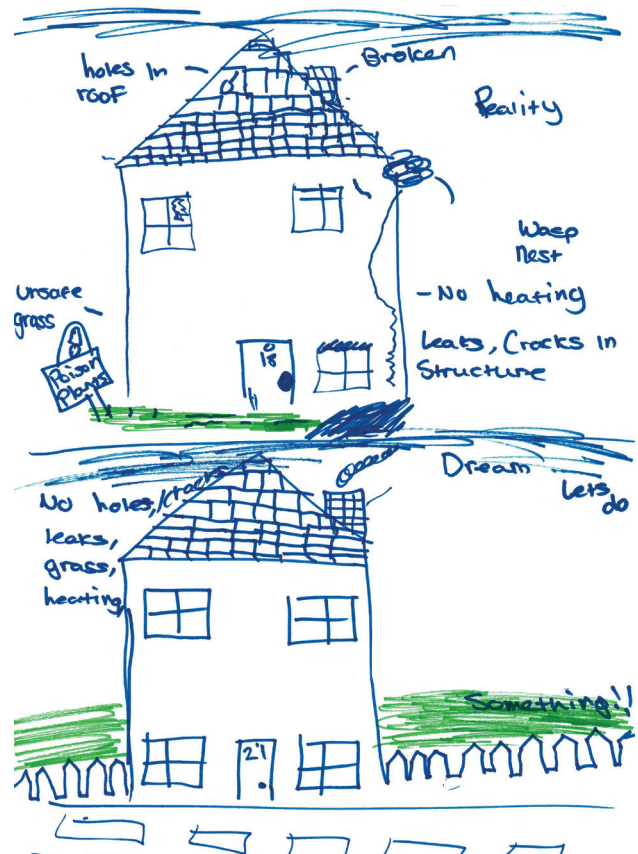
It was really cold in the B&B, there was heating but it wouldn't work most of the time, and it was dirty. The cleaning ladies would come but they never took our rubbish or cleaned at all, I think it was because they knew Mum couldn't speak English so couldn't complain. I was too embarrassed to complain.

There was a washing machine downstairs but it was so expensive we never had enough money to use it while we lived there. There was another family living there and other adults, and then also people visited for holidays. The place looks nice from outside. At breakfast other guests would ask, "Are you here on holidays?" I remember me and my sister saying, "Yes." The day after they saw us, and she was in school uniform. It was so embarrassing.

We did get breakfast. Sometimes we would go multiple times in the morning, to take the food and bring it to the room, so that we could eat throughout the day. The only other thing we could eat was McDonalds or Subway as there were no cooking facilities.

Because we moved around to new areas we did not know how to apply for our benefits as the system was different everywhere, so we lost all our payments. Our original council kept sending us letters saying, 'You're in rent arrears of £5,000/£3,000'. A lot of our post went missing, or wasn't forwarded. It was so confusing. Then they said we were intentionally homeless and more money stopped. My mum started asking friends and family for money. She got into debt of around £7,000.

It wasn't safe. Once someone got in our room. The door was completely broken. I spoke to the receptionist who said he'd look at the CCTV. They never told us what





Nearly 45% of families housed in B&Bs in 2017 lived there for longer than six weeks. 900 in total

happened. Some of the people we lived with were really dirty. People that you just don't feel safe around. There were some families, but some of the people were not in families. It was weird, you would see lots of kids going in, and then just a random group of men coming out of the rooms.

It was a really long and expensive journey to college. The council did not provide any kind of transport for me or my siblings at first. Eventually they started providing a taxi for my brother and sister, who were at school. For my little brother, who used to go to nursery, there was no support and my mum couldn't afford anything, so he stayed all day in the B&B with my mum. There was no garden, no shared space, nowhere for him to play.

Living in the B&B really affected my education. I failed all my exams as I couldn't focus at all. My brothers were running around and playing. I didn't have the opportunity to be able to demonstrate what I could do. I know that exams are not everything, but they help you get to a good university. I wondered if I was stupid or if it was my fault. I was late every Monday morning, because of the traffic. My college didn't know about the housing situation so I had to tell them why I was missing lessons. I did not have any money to travel to college so I talked to them. They were really nice and provided me with free school meals and paid my ticket. They gave it to me in cash so I was able to save up and every two weeks I could buy some shopping for the family. The college did have people you could talk to but you had to look for it. The only support I received was informal, it was just lucky I met kind people. I didn't like to talk about the situation with my friends. I felt really ashamed. No-one my age, that I knew, was in the same situation, so it was weird to talk about serious things.

Our housing officer never picked up the phone. I went to the council. I asked them for help. They sent emails to

her, copying in other people as well. She never replied to any emails. Every single day after college I would be in the council asking about her. We had no social worker for our family even though we requested one.

I know that the law says you shouldn't be housed in a B&B for longer than six weeks, and I think the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says children should grow up somewhere secure and safe where they can play. The B&B wasn't a place where children got any of those rights. You couldn't grow up healthy. While we were there my other little brother had to have an operation. Afterwards he was in a wheelchair and both his legs were in casts. The B&B had steps at the entrance but the wheelchair lift wasn't working. I had to lift him myself. It was not just embarrassing but really unsafe. If I fell he would have been hurt. The people at the reception knew the lift was broken but no-one fixed it. There was no accessible bathroom in the building so it was not possible to bathe my brother. We were washing him with a wet cloth. We needed a hoist, or at least a shower not a bath.

Living in the B&B created so much anxiety in my life. The fact that we didn't have money and I didn't have a place to study. It changed my life, because now I am always anxious. I had this feeling that it was all my fault, because I was the one that was translating and I could have done more to help us. I think the amount of time that we stayed there was the most horrible and difficult thing. Because we didn't know if there was a limit to it or they were going to keep us there for years. I trusted the local authorities more than I think I was supposed to. In the end I started looking online and I found out that the legal limit was six weeks.

The place we live now is in temporary accommodation. There's no legal limit here, there's nothing. There are drug dealers and drug users outside all the time so you can't even open the windows because the smoke of marijuana comes in. The police come. They don't do anything. You see people break into cars. It doesn't feel safe to go back there at night. Because of what happened in the bed and breakfast Mum is even more scared now. It's horrible. ”

Carl

“I lived in a B&B with my Dad for seven months, I moved out a few weeks ago. I'm 16 years-old. We got sent to live there as my Dad was homeless. At first we stayed with friends but in the end they didn't have space for us. Then the council put us in a B&B.

It wasn't good. Most people who lived there were single mums with babies and young children, or drug addicts who had lived there for a while. There was a lot of security guards walking about. You'd always see people smoking joints and other stuff, and loads of alcoholics sitting about. I never felt safe there. All the drug addicts were constantly getting into fights. Police would be constantly turning up to nick people or because madness had gone on.

It felt like they were trying to get as many rooms in as possible. From the outside, it looks like a small building which you could fit a few flats in at the most. Instead on each corridor there's three doors, inside each one of those doors there was six rooms, 18 rooms on each floor. It wasn't just one B&B. There were three or four buildings linked together on that street. All the same design inside.

My Dad is registered disabled, he's got a broken back, but we were put in a room on the top floor. There was no lift. The room was tiny, we barely had any space to walk around. All of our stuff was in bags, and there was just a small little corner to put our things. There was a double and single bed. Two singles, that would've made extra space for us. Then a little door to the toilet and the box shower all squashed in together. There was a period in the winter where the hot water stopped working completely for four or five days. We asked the owners and they said, "There's nothing we can do about it. It's an act of God."

The building always stunk. When we first arrived I found a dead bed bug on the bed. Then I saw blood on the sheet. I pulled the sheet off the bed, and on the mattress saw loads of blood stains too. After a few days me and my dad started itching, and we realised that we'd been getting bitten. We complained to the owner, he said, "We've never had this before. You must've brought it in." We took a dead bed bug to show him but he threw it away. He tried to blame it on us. We told our social worker, but they didn't care.

It made me stressed having such a small space, no privacy of my own. Even going to the toilet, my dad can hear me. There's nothing you can do. You can't do your own thing. You've got no space. The thing that affected me most was that we were just left there. It seemed

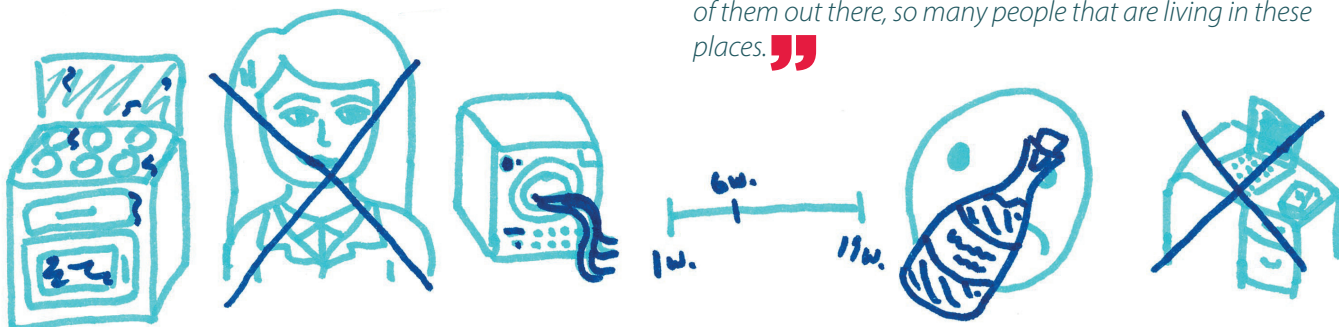
they were going to leave us there forever. We were never updated, no one told us what to do. We didn't make a homelessness application because we didn't know we were meant to and we'd been there seven months before I found out we should.

We came back one day, and the cleaners had been in our room and left our door open. A picture frame had been smashed. Anyone could've walked in and taken anything. Everything we owned was in that room, that was our world. The building rules said staff and owners are not responsible for anyone's belongings. Yet they just walk into your room and then they leave the door wide open!

Another rule said you weren't allowed to have Wi-Fi, not even in your room, and the building had no Wi-Fi. You also weren't allowed visitors. We'd been moved out of area so I had to travel if I wanted to see my pals. If they could come to my house sometimes, it'd be alright, but they couldn't. Some of the single Mum's were fleeing domestic violence so that's one of the reasons you can't have visitors, which makes sense. But not everyone's in the same situation. It would be better to either keep it as a women's refuge or as a B&B. I couldn't really relax ever. Not having so many rules like that.

If it had just been for six weeks it would have been alright, but seven months, feeling like we're going to be here for at least another seven. We had no help from social services or a housing officer. I feel like when my Dad tried to stand up for our rights we were punished. I think we were left there because we complained and so the council weren't trying to help us to get out. We were kicked out of the B&B because they said that we didn't keep the room tidy, and we'd had warnings. But we hadn't had any. I think it was because we complained.

I think the Government needs to shut B&Bs down and get them all properly checked. They need to be changed because it's just crazy. Inside them it's door next to door next to door. You'd think they were cupboards, but you go in and find it's everyone's homes. I think everyone deserves their own space, but in these places, you don't have any. It's like they expect you to have no belongings and no possessions. As though you've gone on holiday. But it is actually where people are living. There's so many of them out there, so many people that are living in these places. ”



16 and 17 year olds in B&Bs

Hannah

“I was in a B&B for 19 weeks when I was 16 years-old. I got put into care on a Friday night and social services said they couldn't put me through the system, so they put me in a B&B. They gave me £4 for my dinner and told me to go back on Monday. There was no social worker, my youth worker took me.

Most people in there were my age, but some were older, up to 23. There was a couple with two kids under three and a baby. There was one much older man. One lad who was 16, was selling weed. It always stank of weed. Then there were more lads aged 17 and some people, including older men, who visited for work or a holiday. I was the only girl.

When I first went there they said if I was there longer than 7 days then my room would be cleaned. I don't think it ever happened once. It was so cold. They never ran the heating. I had to share a bathroom with the other people who lived there. The toilets were never cleaned. I'd never bathe there because it was disgusting. The lights would go off at 6:00pm. The owner saved electricity that way. I could use lights in my room but not in the hallways and toilet. I wouldn't go to the toilets at night because I didn't feel safe in the dark with the boys in the house.

I never felt safe. The front doors were never locked at night. People were going out, getting drunk. Often they'd lose their keys and start banging on the door. It was scary. Men would wait outside and break in if the door opened wanting money that was owed and things like that. The owner was getting drunk with all us kids when her daughter was there, who wasn't even four years- old.

There was nowhere to cook. There was a kitchen where they'd make your breakfast but that was the owner's private space. One night I'd been drinking with the owner and we went in there. It was vile. It wasn't clean water they'd been washing stuff in. I'd been living there for eight weeks already. After that I started getting food I could make with the kettle in my room- packet pasta, pot noodles.

Living in the B&B really affected my wellbeing, and mental and physical health. By the time I left I was self-harming, drinking and taking legal highs everyday. It's easier drinking or smoking through your day than it is to just sit there. I went from being a normal weight to looking anorexic. It completely changed me as a person. I stole off my own family and from shops all the time.

Before I went to the B&B I'd been going to school and working with youth centres. Living there took my education away from me. I didn't want to be seen in a school uniform there because it would have made me feel more vulnerable, showing I was just a young girl. I couldn't imagine what the men I was living with would do if I walked in in my school uniform, I was getting so much unwanted attention anyway. When I lived there I used to think, "How can I actually have a positive attitude to making something of myself or going to school, when I'm going back to somewhere like that?"

I felt at risk constantly. One of the men grabbed my ass when he was drunk. I ran up to my room. Another man came into my room. It took me 20 minutes to get him out. Living there pushed me towards riskier and riskier behaviour. At first I wouldn't wear a skirt but after a while being sexy or sex was a way to try and get by. I wanted somebody there constantly. It's so degrading now to sit here and to say it to somebody else.

One of the worst things I witnessed was a couple fighting. They'd been there for months and took legal highs. One night I heard a girl screaming. She came out of her room. Her arms had been slashed and she was dripping blood all over the walls. Then her boyfriend kicked her down the stairs. Broke all her ribs. We were all just stood there. I was crying. The owner was trying to ring the police.

None of the children who lived there were being supported properly. One of my closest friends ended up dead. No social worker came to check the building. I had no contact with one until the week before I left. Then I got given a social worker that was in the baby's department and didn't know what to do with me. When they did move me I only got two days' notice to pack. It was awful. Everything went in black bags.

I didn't know the law. I just assumed that if social services put you there then it was allowed. I never complained. Children and young people need to know that it's illegal and what their rights are. It needs to be put on a bus advertisement where it can be seen a website's not going to do it.

My message to Government would be stop putting kids in B&Bs. Kids are dying and being beaten down. The one I was in was bad, but my brother was in another one which was even worse. He didn't even have a door on his building. There was no staff. The area where my B&B was had six other B&Bs, all full of kids. My life was stable before I lived there but as soon as I got put into care I didn't see another day of school, I wasn't getting any support from social services. It was pushing me towards a situation where I would become homeless. I'm a single mum now. **”**

Children in Temporary Accommodation

Cameron

“We lived in the hostel for eight months when I was 10, I'm 11 now. Me and my dad couldn't afford the rent on our old place, so we had to move. The hostel was damp. It was always cold.

There was a wasp nest right by the window of our room so we could never open it to let fresh air in. The landlord said they were going to get rid of it, but they never did it. Sometimes my two brothers stayed on weekends. They are aged 6 and 7. We had to share beds. One of my brothers slept in with my dad and one of them would sleep with me. There was a little space by the bed, so we could get to the kitchen and make breakfast. You weren't allowed people to stay, the rules of the hostel said my brothers weren't allowed in after 10:00pm. But we couldn't do that, because we needed to see them.

There were lots of other people living in the hostel. Some of them were families, like me and my dad. There was another little boy downstairs who I used to play football with in the little community garden at the back. Some of the other people who lived there took drugs, and were noisy. Some of them never washed or cleaned their clothes. Living with them felt worrying for me. Sometimes my dad had to go out to the shop, or to work. We had no close family members nearby who could look after me, so sometimes I had to stay in on my own. It was scary. Sometimes there were knocks at the door when my Dad was out.

The council people who helped run the place had a key to our room. They could just walk in whenever they wanted. Sometimes my dad would be in bed on the weekend, trying to have a lie in after a long week of work, and they came knocking at 7:30am- and then just came in. We had no privacy. It was a roof over my head. It was somewhere to sleep and eat, but it wasn't great because now I've got to remember that as my childhood.

We had to share a bathroom, a bath, a toilet and showers. If I was having a bath someone might come to try and give their kids a bath, or have a bath themselves. Then I'd want to hurry. I was scared that someone was going to come in when I was in the toilet as the lock didn't work so I always went in the middle of the night, when less people were around.

We had a tiny kitchen in our room. The water didn't taste right. We always had to spend money on buying big bottles of water. There were about three steps between my bed and the cooker. The fridge was really small, it had the smallest freezer. We mostly ate takeaways. There wasn't really a lot of space in the room. But we did have the garden so I could get fresh air and play with my friend from the hostel, which helped. Most of the time I lived there I would try to be out.

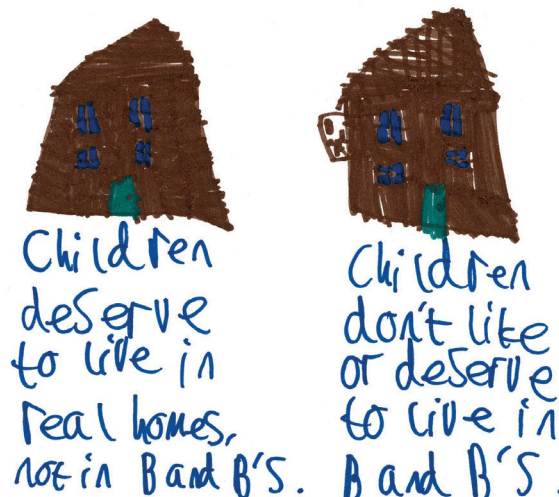
Sometimes I had to take the day off school because it would take two hours to get there because of the traffic. Before we got sent to the hostel the school would've been much closer. At school they had chats with me about how was I feeling, and to ask why was I late. A lady from school spoke to the council, she told them how we've got my brothers in our family, and we needed more than one room to fit us all. That felt like it helped me, that the school tried to help.

I know one of my mates was in a B&B with their mum when they were little. We talked about it because he's been in the same situation. I tried to talk to some friends, and they didn't believe me, but they eventually believed me because my other mates had been round.

It was difficult because there wasn't a lot of room. If I wanted to play a game with my brothers, we couldn't. That's why I tried to get outside a lot. I used to stay at my mate's house a lot. If I could choose a place to live then it would have more space, and better facilities, and a toilet we didn't share. My own room, not shared with my Dad, would be nice.

If you're a young child and you're in accommodation with people who you don't feel safe with, people who take a lot of alcohol and drugs, I don't think that works. I think they should put them in a different house. Families need their own space.

Eight months was too much to live in a place like that.”



Recommendations

It is only if children are listened to that the changes needed to ensure their rights are met will be effectively developed and implemented. These recommendations for change are based on what children in the research have told us.

- The Local Government Ombudsman should take pro-active steps to stop authorities using B&Bs beyond six weeks and action should be taken when they break the law.
- Temporary Accommodation used for families must not have shared facilities and must be child-friendly, clean and safe. It should be inspected every week to two months. All councils should have a safeguarding policy for transferring families to Temporary Accommodation or B&Bs. They should also seek advice from their safeguarding service when doing this.

The Government should:

- Take immediate action to stop children being housed illegally in B&Bs.
- Exclude children's benefits, including child benefit and the child element of Universal Credit, from the scope of the benefit cap. Homeless families should also be exempt from the benefit cap.
- Conduct a cumulative impact assessment of the welfare and benefit reforms on children, particularly those from disadvantaged groups.
- Ensure that support with housing costs for families who rent privately rises in line with increases in local rents.
- Make significant investment to build new social housing to reduce the numbers of homeless households in Temporary Accommodation and the length of time they stay there.
- Extend the six week legal limit to children housed in Temporary Accommodation.
- Commission an independent review to monitor the practice and process of local authorities placing families out of area to ensure that it is an action only of last resort and that the needs and best interests of the children have been fully considered.

- Produce child-friendly information about housing rights. These should be co-produced with children and differentiated for different age groups.
- Provide funding to schools to enable them to provide support for homeless children through dedicated staff. Information sharing between school staff and social workers should be developed to ensure that schools are always aware if one of their students is homeless.
- Ensure that local authorities have enough resources to provide children housed out of area with transport to be able to continue to attend pre-school and/or nursery and further education.
- Take urgent action to stop children in care aged 16 and 17 being housed illegally in B&Bs, even for one night. A duty should be placed on local authorities to collect data to show the numbers of children in care being housed in B&B illegally.



Endnotes

1. Pennington, J. and Garvie. D. (2016) *Desperate to escape: The experiences of homeless families in emergency accommodation* Shelter
2. Spur Heather, (March, 2018) 'The minister doesn't know what's causing homelessness. We're happy to explain' <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/03/the-minister-doesnt-know-whats-causing-homelessness-were-happy-to-explain/>
3. Fitzpatrick et al (April 2018), *The homelessness monitor 2018*, Crisis UK
4. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Q1 1998 to Q4 2017 (March 2018) *Statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention relief: Temporary accommodation tables: Table 775 England*
5. Fitzpatrick et al (April 2018) *The homelessness monitor 2018*, Crisis UK
6. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Q1 1998 to Q4 2017 (March 2018) *Statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention relief: Temporary accommodation tables: Table 775 England*
7. Zaccchaus 2000 Trust, (2017) Z2K Submission to the Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into homelessness November 2017, <https://www.z2k.org/housing-and-homelessness>
8. Children Act 1989 c. 41Part III Provision of accommodation for children, Section 20
9. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (April 2018) *Prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation: Guidance to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people.*
10. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (April 2018) *Prevention of homelessness and provision of accommodation for 16 and 17 year old young people who may be homeless and/or require accommodation: Guidance to children's services authorities and local housing authorities about their duties under Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to secure or provide accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people.*
11. McCoy, S. (2018) Danger Zones and Stepping Stones: Phase Two. A quantitative exploration of young people's experience of temporary living. Available at: <https://uk.depaulcharity.org/danger-zones-stepping-stones-phase-two>
12. The Homeless Link Research Team (April 2018) *Young and Homeless 2018* Homeless Link
13. CRAE FOI requests (October 2017) sent to 326 local authorities of which 67% of local authorities responded.
14. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Q1 1998 to Q4 2017 (March 2018) *Statutory homelessness and homelessness prevention relief: Temporary accommodation tables: Table 775 England*
15. Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *Supplementary guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012*
16. Turner, A. (5 April 2017) *UK's homeless families forced to wave goodbye to their support network* The Guardian
17. Demianyk, G. (14th May 2018) 'Exclusive: 2,000 Birmingham Households Moved To B&Bs Up To 100 Miles Away As Housing Crisis Deepens' https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/birmingham-temporary-accommodation_uk_5af3269be4b0a0d601e94325
18. Shelter (2016) *Home and Away: The Rise in homeless families moved away from their local area*
19. *Nzolameso v City of Westminster* [2015] UKSC 22
20. House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee (2016) *Homelessness. Third Report of Session 2016–17* 45.
21. BBC (September 2017), *Homelessness rise 'likely to have been driven by welfare reforms'*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41241021>
22. Fitzpatrick et al (April 2018), *The homelessness monitor 2018*, Crisis UK
23. Spur Heather, (March, 2018) 'The minister doesn't know what's causing homelessness. We're happy to explain' <http://blog.shelter.org.uk/2018/03/the-minister-doesnt-know-whats-causing-homelessness-were-happy-to-explain/>
24. Pennington, J. and Garvie. D. (2016) *Desperate to Escape - the experiences of homeless families in emergency accommodation* Shelter
25. CESCR Committee (2016), Concluding Observations on the sixth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
26. Children's Rights Alliance for England (2017) , *State of Children's Rights 2017 Briefing 3 Poverty and Homelessness*



About the Children's Rights Alliance for England

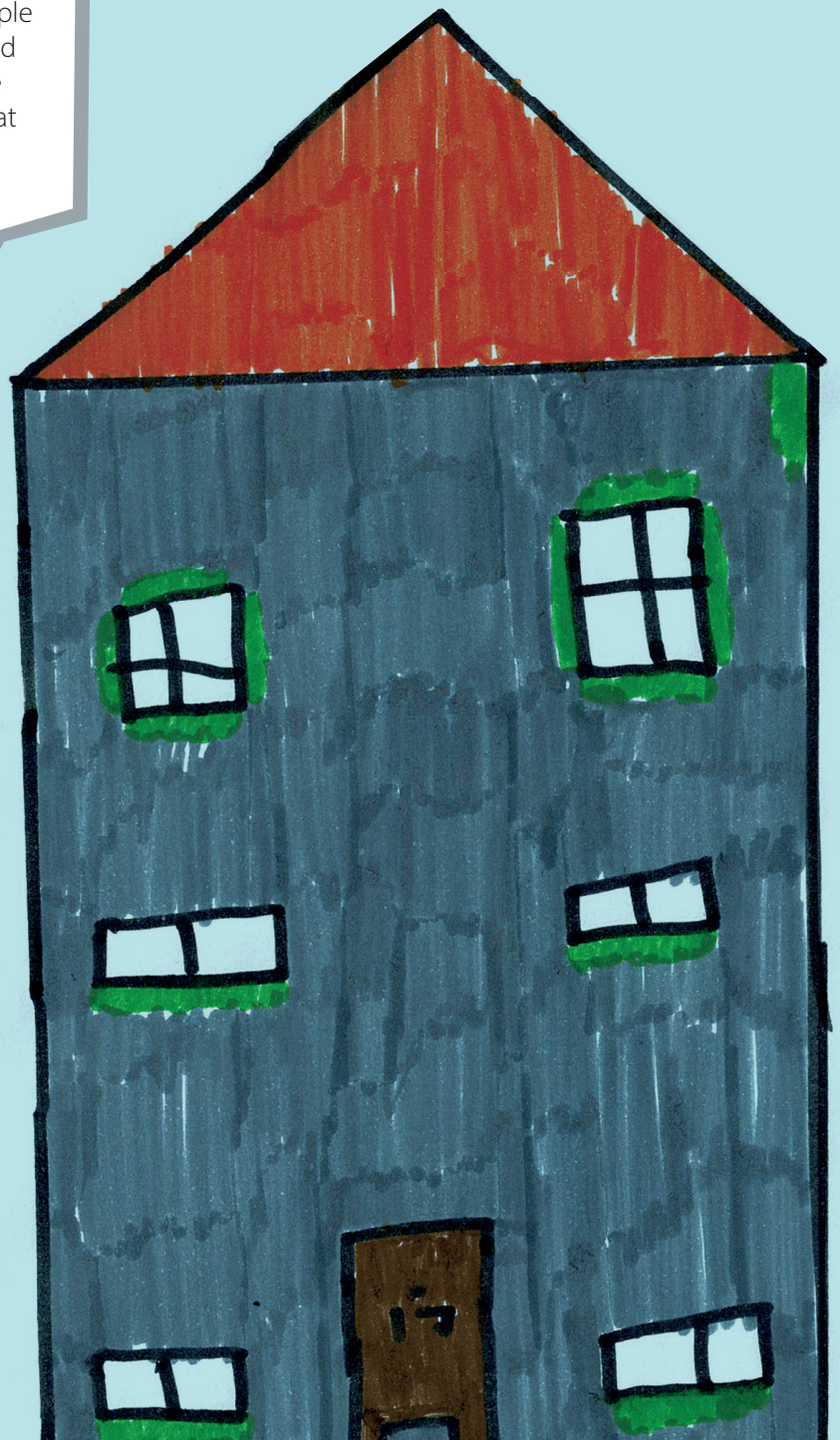


The Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE), part of Just for Kids Law, works with over 150 organisational and individual members to promote children's rights. We believe that human rights are a powerful tool in making life better for children. We fight for children's rights by listening to what they say, carrying out research to understand what children are going through and using the law to challenge those who violate children's rights. We campaign for the people in power to change things for children. And we empower children and those who care about children to push for the changes that they want to see.

#homes4children
Change it!

FUNDED BY

COMIC RELIEF



Children's
Rights Alliance
for England

Children's Rights Alliance for England,

part of Just for Kids Law
Unit 4D, Leroy House,
436 Essex Rd, London N1 3QP

Telephone: 02031742279

Fax: 02076811393

Email: info@crae.org.uk

Website: www.crae.org.uk

Twitter: [@crae_official](https://twitter.com/crae_official)