



empowering people in care

## **Submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on Prioritising Young People with Care Experience in Action Plan for Social Housing**

**July 2016**

### **Introduction**

EPIC makes this short submission to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) on behalf of young people in care and young people with care experience. EPIC's National Advocacy Service has experienced an increasing number of young people presenting as homeless. This definition of homelessness which includes: young people who are couch-surfing, young people staying with friends and family intermittently or young people having no fixed home/permanent address. To date, in 2016, EPIC currently has a total of 350 Advocacy Cases. 163 Advocacy cases related to young people aged over 18, where in 23 of these Advocacy Cases, the main presenting issue related to homelessness.<sup>1</sup>

EPIC would like to highlight the vulnerability of young people with care experience. This group of young people are exceptionally susceptible to homelessness. Young people with care experience leave home at a much earlier age than their peers, have little or no familial supports, lesser financial means and no safety net to fall back on if they become homeless. The risks associated with homelessness include: exposure to street and drug culture, mental health and addiction issues and serious life-long consequences and long-term effects on health and well-being. Therefore, EPIC believe that children and young people with care experience should be identified and prioritised as a vulnerable cohort when developing the current *Action Plan for Housing*.

---

<sup>1</sup> These figures are accurate as of 04/07/16.

There are a number of key issues that EPIC has experienced:

- **Young people who enter care late at the ages of 16 and 17.** It was stated by the previous Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Dr. James Reilly that 14% of young people enter care at 16 and 17.<sup>2</sup> These young people are particularly vulnerable, where they may not meet the eligibility criteria for aftercare, no suitable placements are identified and therefore the only option is to access homeless services.
- Young people who leave care and have to directly access homeless services due to the lack of suitable accommodation options available.
- As a result of HIQA regulations, young people in residential care are forced to move out when they reach the age of 18. This is because they are adults and cannot live in the same residential centre as children under 18. There is frequently no aftercare plan or placement in place for them and they may have to move before completing education/taking State Examinations. Sometimes the only option is a homeless service.
- Young Mothers, including those with intellectual disabilities, who have no suitable accommodation options available to them and are more at risk of having their children taken into care as a result of instability and homelessness.
- Long waiting lists to access Mother and Baby Units.
- Young people who are not in education who are less likely to engage with aftercare and are most vulnerable to homelessness.
- Delays in being granted funding for deposits. This needs to be identified as a barrier to young people with care experience securing private rented accommodation.

---

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/james-reilly-drug-use-in-teen-care-home-is-not-unique-308105.html> (accessed 27/06/16)

## **Circumstances where Young People have become Homeless**

- Young people aged under 18 presenting with challenging behaviours, where placements have broken down. Some young people are being placed into city centre homeless services which are inappropriate and can expose young people to risk e.g. being out on the streets all day.
- Young people who return home at 18, the placement breaks down and the young person has to register as homeless.
- Young people where Foster Care placement breaks down and ends up couch-surfing.
- Young People in Residential Care with no onward placements available-there are currently five young people aged 18+ who are still living in a Residential Centre. The young people are being requested to move on, however there is a lack of suitable accommodation available. One of these young people with mental health issues was asked to return home to an inappropriate placement.
- Young people residing in short-term accommodation e.g. one young woman aged 20 in short-term accommodation where there is no suitable onward accommodation to move to.

## **EPIC Recommendations**

- Timely aftercare planning with an identified and appropriate place to live, must be available to all young people leaving care
- No young person should have to leave their care placement when they reach 18 without having an appropriate place to move to.
- No young person should have to move from care into homeless services.
- Greater supports including parental supports should be available to young people with care experience
- Young people who enter care late need appropriate placements to be available to them and should not have to access homeless services
- Increase number and range of aftercare options including: supported lodging placements, recruitment drive for foster carers for young people in aftercare
- Increase in Housing Assistance Payment
- Additional allocated points for social housing for young people with care experience
- Easy mechanism to re-engage in aftercare services.

For further information please do not hesitate to contact EPIC (01) 8727661 Jennifer Gargan [jennifergargan@epiconline.ie](mailto:jennifergargan@epiconline.ie) or Michelle Martyn [michellemartyn@epiconline.ie](mailto:michellemartyn@epiconline.ie)