

Emmanuel Jovelin, Anne Françoise Dequire, Adrian Adams, Holly Harris, Ruth Adams

**Evaluation of Services and Initiatives for Young Homeless People
in the United Kingdom (Kent) and in France (Nord-Pas-de-Calais)**

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Introduction

The following data reported here are drawn from a project entitled '*Evaluation of Services and Initiatives for Homeless Young People: East Kent and the Nord-Pas-de-Calais*'. This collaborative French-English project carried out a local needs' assessment based on consultation with young homeless people, services managers and local authorities in the two regions. The project analysed the homeless trajectories of young people in order to arrive at a better understanding of the reasons for homelessness among youth and to provide insights into young homeless people's plans and aspirations for the future. Our assessment found that for the majority of young people it is the breakdown of family relationships during adolescence that triggers their leaving home and becoming literally homeless. For other young people it is leaving prison and institutional care homes that results in a homeless situation. The study illustrates however, that it is a complex mix of social, economic and cultural factors governed by the socio-political contexts that contribute to the risk of a young person becoming homeless in the first place – poverty, poor educational achievement and cultural marginalisation were common features of the young people interviewed in East Kent and Nord-Pas-De-Calais.

Our study found that there is a lack of support and welfare assistance to what we might term 'vulnerable young people and vulnerable families' and thus primary prevention strategies are recommended by this study. The difficulties of working preventatively with 'at risk' young people have been examined through our evaluation of services and service providers. A key finding has been the lack of preventative work on youth homelessness in both regions and the need for multi-agency working and existing partnerships to increase their capacity to work preventatively in this area through closer partnership working and communication strategies that are consistent across the regions. The following key points summarise our findings on youth homelessness:

The Study

In the UK and France there is growing concern about a perceived rise in numbers of disaffected young people, many of whom are homeless and not in education, employment or training. In the Lille areas, a January 2001 INSEE study on homeless people puts the number of young homeless people under 18 at

1600. The number of young people with no fixed abode in the East Kent area amounts to about 600 although precise figures for the region are unknown since homeless applications do not record age specific data. This region contains a large group of 'hidden' homeless young people, about which very little is known. In East Kent, the region's Homelessness Forum reports that the greatest increase in homeless applications in recent years is from young people, particularly 16 and 17 year olds. In 2002 new legislation in the UK extended statutory provision to young homeless people aged 16 and over. This project set out to assess the services and initiatives for young homeless people in the 2 regions, and had the following aims:

Aims

- 1) To analyse the homeless trajectories of young people
- 2) To assess the policies & initiatives for countering youth homelessness in both regions
- 3) To examine local authorities' strategic response to the issue of youth homelessness
- 4) To evaluate youth homelessness services by considering the views and perceptions of young homeless people, service providers and service commissioners

Interreg Programme

The project addressed Priority 1: Strengthening cross-border co-operation in the service of the citizen and measure 2: co-operation to develop social cohesion and security.

Summary of key Findings

- In the UK social welfare policies are now focusing on prevention of homelessness as a specific strategic plan while in the Nord-Pas-De-Calais region prevention strategies are largely absent
- Young people's services operate at crisis level in both regions making prevention work very difficult to conceptualise and operationalise
- Co-ordination of services in the deprived neighbourhoods of East Kent & Nord-Pas-De-Calais is weak and service providers feel overwhelmed by the level of need

- Communication between service providers is generally poor and the voluntary sector remains under resourced
- Young homeless people are frequently placed in unsupported Bed and Breakfast lodgings in East Kent and in Nord-Pas-de-Calais there is a large street homeless population of young people
- The demise of industry in East Kent & the lack of employment opportunities in Nord-Pas-De-Calais has created a vacuum of employment opportunities for young people

V Methodology in the UK

The study employed a qualitative methodology to evaluate and assess services and initiatives for young homeless people in the two regions. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews developed by cross national research team. A literature review was carried out on the sociological theories of homelessness and the social policies concerned with youth welfare and homelessness in the UK and France. In the UK the project adopted an ethnographic approach to assessing young people's experience of homelessness and service providers' experiences of service provision. This involved periods of time in attendance and observation at homeless hostels and day care centres for young homeless people in East Kent. In Nord-Pas-De-Calais interviews were carried out with young homeless people on the street and in homeless shelters. In East Kent all the young people interviewed were staying in some sort of homeless accommodation.

Location

The Research activity in the UK focused on three districts in East Kent: Canterbury, Thanet, and Dover District Councils. Fieldwork was conducted in the main towns in these areas as well as in the satellite urban areas surrounding these towns including Margate, Ramsgate, Canterbury, Dover, Deal, Cliftonville, and Whitstable.

Sample

40 young homeless people were interviewed in East Kent of which approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ were female and $\frac{1}{2}$ male. The average age of the young people interviewed was 17; the youngest were 16 and the oldest 22 years.

20 service providers in East Kent were interviewed from housing projects and specialist support agencies including employment and training agencies, the health service, specialist advice services, outreach services and mediation.

Three interviews were held with the strategic authorities from east Kent's district councils. Data was also collected through attendance at the East Kent homelessness forum. This multi-agency forum is unique to the UK side and it is here where the planning and monitoring of homelessness strategies and services takes place between statutory, non statutory and voluntary agencies.

Measures

Interviews were collected in three stages:

Stage 1: Interviews with service providers focused on the perceived needs of young homeless people and how agencies respond to these needs, their objectives and methods of intervention and on the challenges for service delivery and development.

Stage 2: Interviews with young homeless people explored their perceptions of being homeless, their views on the services assisting them, reasons for homelessness, family life and life histories, school and work trajectories and aspirations for the future.

Stage 3: Interviews with local authorities focused on the rationale behind current strategies and decisions in relation to service provision for young homeless people, and their views on challenges and improvements to youth homelessness services.

VI Methodology in France

Presentation of Nord-Pas-de-Calais

Nord-Pas-de-Calais occupies a total surface of 12,414 km², that is 2.3% of the French territory. It is composed of 350 km borders with Belgium and 149 km littoral facing the Channel and the UK. With 321 inhabitants/km², the settlement density is three times higher than the national average. On January 1st, 2002, the population of Nord Pas-de-Calais amounted to 4,017,414 inhabitants, which made the area the 4th most populated French area. The number of young people between 18 and 25 years old is estimated to 468,113¹. Three inhabitants out of ten are less than 20 years old, which makes Nord-Pas-de-Calais the youngest area of France. Nord-Pas-de-Calais is composed of two “departments” and 1,550 communes, seven agglomerations of 100,000 inhabitants and a metropolis of more than one million inhabitants; 86% of the inhabitants living in urban zones.

Methodological approach

We carried out 60 semi-directing interviews with young homeless people: 29 in Lille, 14 in Lens and Arras, 11 in Boulogne, 7 in Calais and 5 in Douai. On the whole, we carried out 16 interviews with girls aged between 18 years and 25 years old and 44 interviews with boys in the same age bracket (but with a predominance of boys aged 21 years). To carry out these 60 interviews, 42 young people were met on the street and 18 in social centres. During spring and summer time, we privileged homeless young people living on the street because they are moving. Summer is considered as the best period to meet them. As winter approaches, it sometimes becomes difficult to meet them elsewhere than in squats, which is not always easy.

We met 27 professionals who work with these young people : teachers, establishments and local missions directors, people responsible for youth services, people working in town halls, (Lille, Douai, Arras, Roubaix, Cambrai, Calais, Boulogne, Valenciennes and Lens).

Ten personalities belonging to various tendencies of the political field were questioned (in Lille, Valenciennes, Boulogne, Calais, Tourcoing, Roubaix, Douai, Arras and Lens).

¹ Sources: «Direction régionale des affaires sanitaires et sociales»
«Direction de la recherche, des études, de l'évaluation et des statistiques».

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The phenomenon of homeless young people is increasing in the Nord Pas de Calais (France) and in East Kent (UK). This book's project aims at :

- analyzing homeless young people's life conditions (homeless young people from 16 to 25 years old)
- understanding the direction they give to their lives and the assistances that are granted to them.
- evaluating and comparing assistance possibilities in favour of these young people in the two areas (Kent and Nord Pas de Calais). We would like to understand the operating mode of accompaniment services, the coordination of these services in order to improve the accompaniment of homeless young people, while taking their experiments and expectations into account.

Our ambition is to understand social structures' approaches and needs in order to face the problems encountered by homeless young people. The international aspect of this book will make it possible to draw comparisons in the analysis of homeless young people's living conditions and of accompaniment practices on both sides of the English Channel